



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh  
New Series Volume 9 Number 1 January 2012

### **FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2012: Shamirpet Lake.**

Some 20km away from Secunderabad, on the Hyderabad-Karimnagar highway, is this lovely man-made lake, which is an excellent spot for birding. The large freshwater source and the surrounding rocky grassy terrain make this ideal for water birds as well as larks. The Ashy-crowned Sparrow-lark and the Syke's Crested Lark have been seen here. The place has yielded Yellow-wattled Lapwings as well.

This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

### **INDOOR MEETING: HAWAII BIRDS**

**Thursday, 19th January 2012, 6PM: Association of German Culture, 203, Hermitage Office Complex, Hill Fort Road, Nampally.**

Hawai'i is home to some of the rarest and most beautiful birds in the world. Jim Denny, in this 34 minute film, has captured the beauty of the graceful seabirds at Kilauea Point, the precious honeycreepers of the Alak'i Swamp, the windswept plains of Kohala and the native forest of Mauna Kea.

Join us for this exotic screening!

*We wish all our members  
a very happy and prosperous  
New Year*



## THE HSBC HYDERABAD BIRD RACE



**Sunday – 12<sup>th</sup> February 2012**

You will be glad to know that HSBC is sponsoring the “BIRD RACE” again this year in Hyderabad. For the information of members who have joined our society recently, BSAP and HSBC had organized and conducted the Bird Race from 2007-2009 consecutively for three years, which was a great success. This year the BSAP and GHAC are jointly organizing the Bird Race under the HSBC programme. We are confident that with your continued support we should be able to make the race a greater success this year.

The rules, in a nutshell, are:

1. Participants have to bring their own cars/bikes.
2. Each car will have four persons and this will form a Team. (Two motorbikes with four riders can also be considered a team).
3. If you do not have a car and want to participate - no problem! We will try and accommodate you in somebody's car.
4. Each car will have a CAPTAIN who will be familiar with the geography of Hyderabad and its environs and also be reasonably knowledgeable in bird identification.
5. First-timers, or those who are not familiar with bird watching but still want to have lots of fun, again no problem – they will be included in someone else's team. And remember – this race is not only for BSAP & GHAC members but open to all. So get your friends - young and old, school children, etc.
6. The cars will be flagged off early in the morning and have to report back at sunset, that is, almost 12 hours of birding.
7. Each team will be given a Log Book containing a list of birds found in our region, as also names of places and possible locations that you can visit. You need to tick mark all the bird species that you spot and jot where you see them. These logbooks should be surrendered to the judges in the evening for their scrutiny.
8. You are free to go to any location you want, as long as you keep within a radius of about 50 – 60 kms (as the crow flies) around Hyderabad.
9. The criterion is that you try and record as many bird species as possible to win the first prize.
10. If a winning team comprises more than four members (e.g. children), the number of prizes given will still be limited to four.
11. There will be prizes like:
  - a. **Bird of the Day:** Each team can select one bird from their list of sightings, which they feel is the highlight.
  - b. **Dip of the Day:** Each team should mention one bird, which they were sure they would see but did not.
12. Despite the rules, the main purpose is to have loads of fun. And we do, of course, expect total honesty and integrity from the participants.

## PROGRAM

- Cars will be flagged off at **6:00 AM sharp on Sunday, 12.02.2012**, from Hyderabad Public School, Begumpet Main Road, next to the foot over-bridge. Captain and Team members should report well in time.
- Each car will be given a sticker with a bird name. This will be the name of your team. This sticker should be stuck prominently on the left upper corner of the front windshield.
- After a briefing about the rules, each car will be given a Log Book and four breakfast hampers.
- You have to carry your own lunch, water and snacks, binoculars and field guides. We advise you to wear dull-colored clothing, good walking shoes and a cap.
- You can visit as many places as possible – the more the better. We have also listed a few prominent places in the Log Book for your convenience.
- The cars must return latest by **6:00 PM** and the Captains have to submit their Log Books to the organizers at the decided Venue which shall be informed in the next circular. Please note that Teams submitting their Log Books after 6:10 PM are liable to be disqualified. So, leave enough margins for delays due to traffic jams, and target to reach the hotel by 6:00 PM.
- Light refreshments will be served on arrival, which you will need, anyway!
- The function will start by 7:00 PM. The Chief Guest and the organizers will address the gathering. Captains will also be required to speak for a few minutes each, recounting the team's experiences during the day. We expect you to make this as lively and funny as possible! This will be followed by prize distribution and **DINNER** for all the participants.
- **There is no entry fee.**

Please rush and register your names for this wonderful event. The last date for receiving the entries is **6PM on 5.02.12 (Sunday)**.

You can give your names and contact details (including those of your team members) to:

Mr Asif Husain Arastu - 9908611496 / [asifjoy@yahoo.com](mailto:asifjoy@yahoo.com)  
Mr Shafaat Ulla – 9849229552 / [shafaat\\_ulla@yahoo.co.in](mailto:shafaat_ulla@yahoo.co.in)

For any clarifications, please feel free to contact us.

Hope to see you all in large numbers to make this event a huge success!

Bird Race Organizing Committee

## **HOW TO BUY BIRDING BINOCULARS**

Shafaat Ulla

Many of the new comers to our society ask, quite pertinently, what binoculars to buy and from where. Since these are the frequently asked questions, I decided to do some home work of gathering a few facts and figures and sharing the information with my fellow birders.

The most suitable size of a binocular for bird watching and universally recommended is **8 X 40** and this is clearly marked on every piece. The first figure indicates the magnification, that is the object one sees is magnified 8 times or more appropriately the number of times the object is brought nearer to the observer. The second figure indicates the diameter of the objective lens (the broader end) in millimetres and indicates the quantum of light admitted into the binocular. It is therefore the most popular size used by bird watchers.

There are other sizes also which are often used by birders such as 6 X 30, 7 X 35, 9 X 45, etc. However anything beyond 9 magnification gets too heavy and shaky and hence, is not very popular with birders on the move.

Another interesting factor to be noted is the ratio of the diameter of the objective lens to the magnification, known as Exit Pupil. Divide the diameter of the lens by the figure of magnification (40 divided by 8) gives 5 mm, which is equal to the pupil of the human eye. Therefore for best results ensure that the binoculars you buy has an exit pupil of 5 mm. Please note the exit pupils of the sizes mentioned above.

There is another aspect which you can look into, that is, the Field of View (FOV). The larger the FOV, the better. In other words wide angled binoculars are always preferred. This is indicated in two ways on the instrument: it will indicate the angle as 7.5 or 8.2 degrees etc. or as 360 ft. at 1000 yds. or 430 ft at 1000 yds. etc. Which means the angle of vision will cover 360 or 430 feet at 1000 yards. If I were you, I will not attach too much importance to this as different makes have their own design features. But it is worth keeping this aspect in mind while choosing a piece.

There are basically three adjustments in the binoculars:

1. Eye Adjustment - The distance between the eyes is called "inter-pupillary distance" which varies from person

to person. Grasp each barrel firmly and move the barrels closer together or further apart till you get a single circular field.

2. Center Focus - After having set the eye adjustment, objects at various distances can be brought into focus by rotating the central wheel in clock wise or anti-clock wise direction.

3. Diopter Setting - The right side of the binocular has an adjustable eye piece with which one can fine tune the focus in case the power of your left eye differs from the right eye. Otherwise keep it always on '0'.

Most of the top brands have twist-up eye cups. If you wear glasses, ensure that the cups are in the down position to get better field of view.

Having said that, it is important that you buy a well-known brand and from a reputed and authorised outlet. This way you will avoid cheap imitations which are available in plenty. An 8 X 40 of reasonable quality starts from around Rs. 5000/- to 6000/- (a little less for 7 X 35) and can go up to Rs. 50000/- for top-of-the-line models, used by professionals and birders with deep pockets. Many of the photography shops are keeping stocks of different binoculars and one has to look around. Also look up some established customs notified shops at Abids. I advise you all to do some market research to get the best bargain.

If I may add - buy the binoculars during day time. Test the piece by stepping out of the shop and focussing on different objects to get a feel of the adjustments. If there is parallax error, you will notice immediately. Faulty adjustments will give you double image. Move the binoculars slowly from side to side. If the glasses have not been corrected for definition, the change of view you get as you move is abrupt and disjointed. This indicates poor definition. As you look through, ensure that there are no coloured borders to the image. Good lenses are coated and are bluish-green in colour. Avoid lenses with other colours.

If anyone needs further advice, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me. Happy birding!

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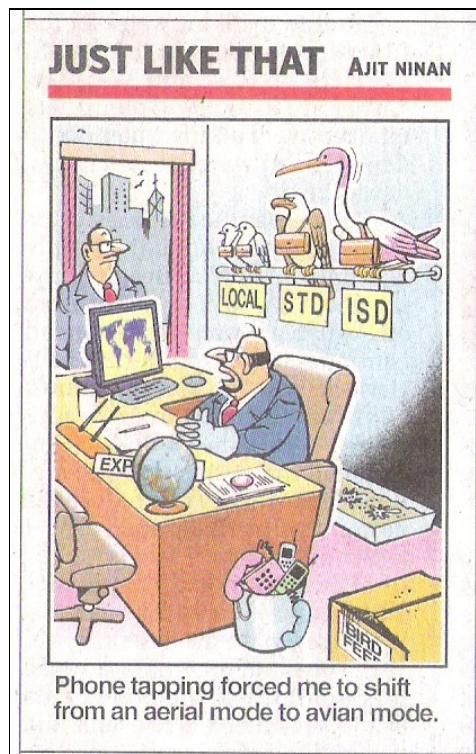
## **Trip to Pocharam – 25<sup>th</sup> December 2011**

Editor's note: The Field Visit to Pocharam on 25<sup>th</sup> December, 2011 was attended by only two members and hence we are not carrying a Trip Report this time. Given below is the list of birds seen by them:

1. Bar-headed Goose	17. River Tern
2. Ruddy Shelduck	18. Grey Wagtail
3. Osprey	19. Brahminy Kite
4. Common Teal	20. Green Bee-eater
5. Northern Pintail	21. White-throated Munia
6. Eurasian Wigeon	22. Common Hoopoe
7. Little Cormorant	23. Paddyfield Pipit
8. Large Cormorant	24. Grey Heron
9. Common Redshank	25. Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark
10. Green Sandpiper	26. Sykes's Crested Lark
11. Little Ringed Plover	27. Rufous-tailed Lark
12. Wood Sandpiper	28. Red-winged Bushlark
13. Asian Openbill	29. Oriental Magpie Robin
14. Spot-billed Duck	30. Indian Robin
15. Black Ibis	31. Purple Sunbird
16. Black-headed Ibis	32. Purple-rumped Sunbird

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## **Bird Humour**



(From The Times of India)

## KAIGA BIODIVERSITY PUZZLES SCIENTISTS

Bangalore: Despite apprehensions about the Kaiga nuclear power station's impact on the environment and a possible threat of radiation, a surge in the population of rare animals, birds and insects in the villages surrounding the plant has surprised the scientific community.

Besides tiger, panther and gaur, which are sighted frequently in the region, rare birds like the open-billed stork, gold-fronted chloropsis and Malabar pied hornbill are arriving in large numbers.

The Kaiga power station authorities attributed the phenomenon to security and the Forest Department claimed that increased monitoring in the area after it was declared a part of the Anshi-Dandeli Tiger reserve had contributed to the growth in biodiversity.

The Asian open-billed stork, which used to arrive alone and at times in pairs, now comes in large numbers. So are birds of prey like Osprey, three pairs of which were spotted along River Kali.

The Malabar pied hornbills have made some villages around Kaiga their home. The birds are found in sizeable numbers at Kaiga Hartuga, Kuchegar and Virje.

"It is amazing that more than 60-70 open-billed storks and other birds have arrived here this year. This is a record of sorts. With each passing year, the flock's number has been increasing," said K Puttaraju, a bird expert, photographer and a scientific officer at the Kaiga station.

Bird watchers and forest officials have confirmed sighting several rare and migratory birds in Irpage, Kerwadi, Devalmakki, Wailwada and Halga-Ulga villages on the left bank of the river.

Sighting of animals like tiger, panther, gaur, sambar, jackal and Malabar giant squirrel near the plant is a treat to the eye. The place is home to 220 species of birds, about 300 butterflies and more than 500 moths. India's biggest butterfly, the Southern Birdwing, and Asia's largest moth, Atlas (wingspan of 12 inches), are found in abundance here.

Though the exact reason for the sudden surge in biodiversity is not known, Puttaraju attributes it to the strict security around the Kaiga plant, which has minimised hunting by villagers.

"We have a strong Central Industrial Security Force manning the Kaiga plant and the town. This has brought down hunting activities. This could be a reason why birds and animals feel secure and flock to the Kaiga region," Puttaraju said.

Stating that the local people were showing interest in conservation, following an education programme initiated by the power plant, he said creation of employment opportunities by the plant had also reduced hunting.

Some experts say water discharged from the plant was a bit warm compared to the running river water. "Warm water is good for breeding fish. Since fish are in abundance in the region, birds find it a feasible place to roost," said another bird expert.

More than 220 species of birds have been sighted in the region. They include Indian Pitta, Osprey, adjutant stork, wooly-necked stork, darter, barn fish owl, white and black ibis; rare Ceylon frogmouth, crested serpent eagle, gold-fronted chloropsis and black stilt.

Butterfly species include southern birdwing, blue mormon, tiny glass blue, red mormon, crimson rose, six types of pansies and Nawaz.

- DH News Service, 19<sup>th</sup> January 2012

## PROTECTING BIRDS, WITH THE SOUNDS OF SILENCE

*Vettangudi villagers observe Deepavali by lighting lamps and shunning crackers*

The Bishnois of Rajasthan, religiously protecting animals and birds for over five centuries now, may be delighted that a fragment of their ecological faith has wafted across the Vindhya range to a remote village in Tamil Nadu's Sivaganga district.

Step into the lush green canopy of two proximate villages - Vettangudi Patti and Kollukudi Patti in Tirupathur taluk that encompass three "Kanmaais" (large irrigation tanks), the "mantra" in everyone's lips is not any esoteric or sacred chant, but a speech-act that delivers "silence".

If the Vettangudi Bird Sanctuary that nestles on two of these tank-beds spread over 38.4 hectares, is still pleasant to thousands of migratory birds from around the globe for over four decades now, it is thanks to a golden rule the people of these two villages have passionately upheld; a la the Bishnoi community's creed to preserve all life forms.

Good or bad times, it is scarcely believable that in these days of high-decibel excitement, about 800-odd people of these two village panchayats, namely Vettangudi Patti and Kollukudi Patti, closest to the sanctuary, have given a permanent holiday to fire-crackers. Even beating a small drum badgering native pride is a taboo for a profoundly environmental cause.

While Vettangudi was officially declared a bird sanctuary in June 1977 by the Tamil Nadu Forest Department, for long years before that an amazing variety of migratory birds have been gravitating to the "Kanmaais" of these two villages to make it a nature's receptacle for nesting and breeding.

The Vettangudi Bird Sanctuary, located about 51km from the temple city of Madurai, tucked away a wee bit inside as you drive down the Madurai-Melur-Tirupathur Highway in Sivaganga district, is not just an ornithologist's delight for its rich miscellaneous croons. It also mirrors how humans live in harmony with nature setting aside cultural compulsions. It is not that the villagers do not celebrate a universal festival like "Deepavali". Little bright lamps dot the homes in these two villages for the occasion. But "for the last 43 years, as I know, nobody has burst a single cracker here to celebrate the festival as we don't want the loud noise to disturb or unsettle the birds that flock here," says Chennaiah of Vettangudi.

Typically, the birds from distant lands reach the sanctuary by September-end every year and stay on till March, said Mr Palanichamy, Forest Ranger, Tirupathur. By that time, the birds would have hatched and the young ones eager to take wings. This year, 5000 birds have already homed in so far.

As rest of India celebrated "Deepavali" with a variety of deafening crackers, from the sturdy "Red Fort double", "thousand-wallahs" to "atom bombs", the locals who play host to these birds observed as usual, a quiet, self-imposed moratorium on all crackers in a noble quest to protect the sanctuary.

"The people here do not use fire crackers at a funeral procession or beat the traditional drum as it can scare away the birds," says Sivaganga District Forest Officer Sampath Lal Gupta. The migratory birds come for "nesting and breeding", mostly from the Trans-Himalayan region, including some of the erstwhile Soviet Republics like Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, Tibet, besides from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Maldives.

Giving birth to new life is so sacred in the Eastern traditions that nobody wants to inconvenience these birds with even a sharp rustle, adds Gupta, explaining how the villagers of Vettangudi Patti and Kollukudi Patti are "somewhat like the Bishnois practicing this self-restraint to protect wildlife."

The people in these two villages may not be total vegetarians like the Bishnois, but when it came to ensuring a comfortable, noise-free ambience for the birds to nest and breed, the people caringly bond with them.

"It's a concern we show for the birds as we would do for our children by ensuring all is silent here," says Ms Karunambikai, a resident. "To give up a custom may seem no big deal, but people do it for the birds," she adds, explaining the importance of being earnest in saying 'no' to crackers.

From the "darter", "Indian cormorant", "night heron", "grey heron", "pond heron", "cattle egret", "great egret", "Asian open bill", "glossy ibis", "common coot", "green peafowl", to the "white-breasted waterhen", the veteran bird watcher of the village, K R Veeriah lists 25 such exotic winged ones who come calling to Sivaganga District every year.

The Forest Department also reinforces the keep-silence people's creed, routinely sensitizing people right from school children upwards. "Even a kid here will tell you why not to burst crackers," chuckles Veeriah, adding, the birds can be viewed in a close natural setting without need for binoculars.

As a reciprocal gesture to the villagers, "we pass on the proceeds of the sale of bushes-like growth as firewood to the Village Forest Committee" to encourage their conservation efforts, said Gupta, adding, the funds so transferred averaged Rs.75,000 per year in the last three years. One small step by the people has meant a leap for wildlife protection at Vettangudi.

- *Deccan Herald, 9<sup>th</sup> November 2011*

## UDUPI MAN EYES GUINNESS RECORD WITH 5000 STAMPS ON BIRDS

If you thought the only link between birds and the postal service is the carrier pigeon, Daniel Monthero, an office assistant at St Mary's Syrian College, Brahmavar, Karnataka will make you think again.

For, Monthero, with his collection of over 5000 stamps on birds, has claimed to have made it to the Guinness Book of World Records.

Monthero exhibited his stamps at the SMS Community Hall, Brahmavar, in a bid to set a new Guinness record on Wednesday.

The present Guinness record for the biggest collection of stamps on birds is in the name of one Paul Ervin of Germany, who has a collection of over 2400 stamps on birds, says Monthero, who is awaiting official confirmation of his new record from the Guinness authorities.

The world's first stamp on birds, that of a mute swan (*Cygnus olor*), issued in 1854, in Western Australia, India's first postal stamp on birds, that of a Magpie and Jay, issued in 1968, diamond-studded stamp on mute swan issued by Swarovski, in Austria, gold-plated stamp on US State Birds and Flowers, etc were the highlights of the show.

Monthero told Express that he had started the hobby of collecting stamps when he was in Standard V under the guidance of philatelist of Numisphila Vittaldas Shanubhag. His hobby took him all over India.

"It is said that there are over 9800 species of birds in 27 groups. I am proud to say that I have stamps on the birds of all the 27 groups," said Monthero, whose philatelic feats have won him several national and international awards. Deputy Commissioner of Udupi MT Reju inaugurated the exhibition, in the presence of president of the Dakshina Kannada District Philatelists' Association MK Krishnaiah. Krishnaiah said Monthero's feat was an honour to all philatelists of the region.

- *Indian Express, 8<sup>th</sup> December 2011*

## **Bird of the Month**

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

### **Oriental White-eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*)**



**Oriental White-eye** (Ananthagiri, 01-03-2010)

Order: Passeriformes

Family: Zosteropidae (disputed)

Genus: *Zosterops*

Species: *Z. palpebrosus*

Size: 8-9 cm

**Description:** The Oriental White-eye is one of the most beautiful passerines from the white-eye family. With yellowish-olive upperparts, whitish-grey underparts (yellow in some sub-species), prominent white ring around the eye, yellow throat and vent, it is distinctive and instantly recognizable. The sexes are alike. The species is widespread and is part of a 'superspecies complex' which includes Japanese White-eye (*Zosterops japonicus*), Philippine or Lowland White-eye (*Zosterops meyeni*) and possibly others. Of the around eleven subspecies which are well-recognised, the ones seen in India include the nominate race (extending across north India), *Z. p. nilgiriensis* (Western Ghats and the hills of south India), *Z. p. salimalii* (Eastern Ghats), and *Z. p. egregius* (plains of India). The Nicobar Islands population is placed under *nicobaricus* whereas the Andaman Islands have a separate, unnamed population. In addition, the Western Himalayas have the rare form *occidentis*, which has dark green upperparts and brown-tinged flanks.

The taxonomy of the species is still not completely clear, with some island populations said to be distinctive. The family itself is sometimes questioned, being nested with the *Stachyris* babblers. The scientific and English common names are derived from the Greek word *zosterops*, which means 'girdle-eye'.

**Behaviour:** The Oriental White-eye is a resident breeder in open woodland in tropical Asia. It is a sociable bird,

forming small flocks which separate only at the onset of the breeding season. They are highly arboreal, rarely descending to the ground. They forage in small groups, going from one plant to another, and use a soft, nasal 'cheer' as their contact call. They pollinate flowers when visiting them for flower insects (such as thrips) and possibly nectar. Their diet consists mainly of small insects, though they do eat nectar and fruits of different kinds. The forehead often gets coloured by pollen, causing confusion in identification. They have been observed bathing in dew collected on leaves. They are not very strong fliers, though they have been known to disperse to new areas (including off-shore islands) in strong winds.

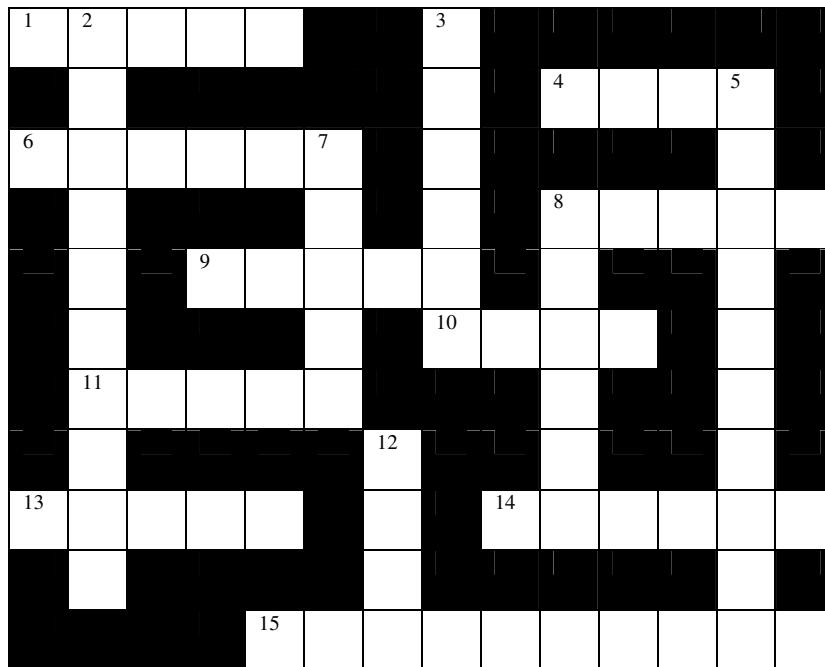
While nesting, they may mob squirrels or other perceived threats, but being small, are generally not very aggressive. Their predators include bats and birds like the White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*). Cases of inter-specific feeding are known, with the white-eyes feeding chicks of the Asian Paradise-flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*).

**Nesting:** The Oriental White-eye nests between February and September, but April is the peak breeding period. It builds a compact, cup-like nest out of cobwebs, lichen and plant fibre, and places it like a hammock in the fork of a branch (sometimes even near the ground level). Like other white-eyes, it sometimes steals nesting material from the nests of other birds. The nest-building process takes around 4 days, and the clutch of 2 pale blue eggs is laid within a span of a couple of days. Hatching and fledging take around 10 days each, with both sexes participating in the brooding duties.

## **BIRDING CROSSWORD**

Umesh Mani

The answers to the clues given below are bird names or other birding-related terms. Let's see how many you can find!  
(*Solutions in next month's Pitta*)



### **ACROSS**

1	-	Sounds like they use skewers to eat fish (5)
4	-	Boast (4)
6	-	Do they fire at people? (6)
8	-	Always worry about the young (5)
9	-	Two times with a lisp? Not quite! (5)
10	-	Go left or right (4)
11	-	Very long leg (5)
13	-	A brave man has some fun (5)
14	-	Do they follow people around? (6)
15	-	Always thinks about money! (10)

### **DOWN**

2	-	Royal angler (10)
3	-	Turns its nose up at everyone! (6)
5	-	Would sound like, someone who gives a small kiss (10)
7	-	Fast and fleet (5)
8	-	Hair-dresser has trouble at the end (6)
12	-	A delicate shade of blue (4)

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**For Private Circulation Only**

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**For information, write to:** Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** [http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap\\_online](http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online). **Website:** [www.bsap.in](http://www.bsap.in). **Society membership** (in Rs.): Admission: 100; Annual: 400 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh  
New Series Volume 9 Number 2 February 2012

**FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 26<sup>th</sup> February 2012, 6.30AM: ICRISAT, Patancheru.**

ICRISAT is one of the richest birding spots around the city and a winter visit here is near mandatory. It boasts of a varied habitat with lakes, fields, ponds, grasslands, etc, and this makes for a varied species list. ICRISAT may give us Wire-tailed Swallows, Blue-tailed Bee-eaters and Yellow-wattled Lapwings, besides the water birds, a few raptors and some bush birds as well.

This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

**Trip Report – Shamirpet Lake – 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2012**

Text: Jayati Mitra, Photos: Rahul Rajvanshi



Shamirpet Lake is situated on the outskirts of Hyderabad, amidst a scenic, rocky setting. We drove along in the dark morning, the cold wind beating across my face. Gradually the sun rose above the horizon and the warmth of the crimson rays made me feel united with Nature. I looked forward to a very exciting day ahead.

Other members and I walked along the narrow path and noticed a Grey Francolin (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) on the ground with a barred pattern over its body. Soon we

were attracted by a group of Red-wattled Lapwings (*Vanellus indicus*) calling from the fields. Our attention was then drawn towards the Bay-backed Shrike (*Lanius vittatus*) perched atop a tree. The black mark across the eye and the white and buff belly were clearly visible. Next, we were guided by sweet whistling tunes and it was a delightful sight. The Common Iora (*Aegithina tiphia*), with its bright yellow underside and white bars on its black wings, was calling and the female, conspicuous with olive green wings and tail, was flitting beside it.



**Bay-backed Shrike**

We stood for some time enjoying the spectacle and then moved forward along the rocky ground towards the lake. It was disappointing to see that the lake had shrunk considerably to probably a half of its original size. We walked further over dried tufts of grass and hard parched ground till the lake came into full view.

A group of Painted Storks (*Mycteria leucocephala*) were resting on a rock on the opposite side. The black band across the wing and pink feathers of the birds made a pleasant sight. We also spotted a Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*), with a black supercilium on its white head. Some Intermediate (*Mesophoyx intermedia*) and Little Egrets (*Egretta garzetta*) were also seen.



**Grey Heron**

We observed closely the Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucus*), identified by its greyish-brown wings and white under-parts, running across the bank. Another bird we noticed was the Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*), with its brown back and white breast, moving up and down. It had a band around its neck and rings around its eyes too.



**Common Sandpiper**

We climbed onto an adjacent rock and looked up. Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*), in flocks, were flying around and catching insects. As they suddenly dived down, their rufous head and neck and typical deep forked tail could be seen. A White-browed Wagtail (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*) with a typical white brow and shoulder stripe was seen occasionally. Suddenly a small bird flew up from the ground and dived down. We identified it as the Small Pratincole (*Glareola lactea*). Its head was brown with a black beak and it had a forked white tail with a black band.



**Small Pratincole**

We walked across a little to the other side to closely observe the Bar-headed Goose (*Anser indicus*). The bird had two blackish bars around its heads with a grey body and a yellow bill. We were a little tired by now and decided to rest on a rock. Just then, we spotted a White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) with bright blue wings waiting to catch its prey.



**Sykes's Crested Lark**

Soon it was time to return. On our way back, we noticed a sudden movement on a nearby boulder. A Sykes's Crested Lark (*Galerida deva*) was sitting motionless and perfectly camouflaged against the ground. Its crest was prominent and very few streaks were visible on its rufous

breast. As we walked along, the black-bellied Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark (*Eremopterix grisea*) also greeted us. Its grey wings and black under-parts were clearly visible but we did not notice any of these birds in flight.



**Little Stint (L) & Common Greenshank (R)**

It was time to leave and at last a Green Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*) with its golden-brown crown and bright green plumage tinged with blue, showed up on the way. We returned home with sweet memories hoping to be back again in the near future.

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### Bird Humour



(From Deccan Herald, 08-12-2011)

## **Report – Indoor Meeting – Birds of Hawai'i – 19<sup>th</sup> January 2012**

C B Rao

On Thursday, January 19, 2012, BSAP screened the documentary, 'Birds of Hawai'i' at Association of German Culture, Hyderabad. Compared to our regular meetings the attendance was thin. In fact the colourful birds of Hawai'i deserve more attention for their variety and speciality.

The introduction to this video says, "From the graceful seabirds at Kilauea Point and the precious honeycreepers of the Alka'i Swamp to the windswept plains of Kohala and the native forest of Mauna Kea, Hawaii is home to some of the rarest and most beautiful birds in the world. This documentary presents over 90 species in crisp digital video."

This video was shot by Jim Denny, a resident of Kauai Island for more than 30 years. Melodious music by Paul Togioka and Hai Kinnaman accompanied this video.

Hawaii has varied climate and topography and even volcanoes. Maui island, which I had visited, comes in the rain shadow area and comprises of a mountain with volcanoes and a big rain forest with several waterfalls.

The travel to West Maui through winding roads, amidst bamboo forests and waterfalls along the coast of the Pacific Ocean, is amazing. The rain forest, with several colourful birds, is beautiful.

On the way I photographed this **Northern Cardinal**.



**Northern Cardinal**

The Nene is the official state bird of Hawai'i. For a complete list of birds of Hawaii is available at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_birds\\_of\\_Hawaii](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_birds_of_Hawaii). In addition to native birds, Hawaii also has several introduced birds. Some birds like the Common Myna or Indian Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) and the Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*) are Indian birds that were introduced in Hawaii along with the Indian Mongoose, which has no natural predator in Hawaii as in India. The mongoose has a taste for birds and especially, bird eggs. This causes a problem to indigenous birds. It was brought to control the rat population in these islands. However, it was not successful. I observed that the introduced species of birds in Hawaii are healthy and robust. A complete list of introduced birds can be found at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_bird\\_species\\_introduced\\_to\\_the\\_Hawaiian\\_Islands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_bird_species_introduced_to_the_Hawaiian_Islands).

At the end, light refreshments and tea were served to all guests. We are ever so grateful to the German Centre for screening of such informative films.

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## **Bird of the Month**

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

### **Oriental Magpie Robin (*Copsychus saularis*)**



**Oriental Magpie Robin** (Ananthagiri, 01-03-2010)

Order: Passeriformes  
Family: Muscicapidae  
Genus: *Copsychus*  
Species: *C. saularis*  
Size: 17 cm

**Description:** The Oriental Magpie Robin is a small passerine which was originally classified as a member of the thrush family Turdidae, but is now considered as an old-world flycatcher. It is a distinctive black-and-white bird with a long tail, which is normally held upright while foraging on the ground or while perching. The male has black upperparts, head and throat, and a white belly, shoulder patch and outer tail feathers. In females, the black is replaced by grayish-black and the white by grayish-white. Young birds have scaly brown upperparts and head.

The Oriental Magpie Robin is a resident breeder in most of tropical southern Asia, from eastern Pakistan and central India east to Sri Lanka, Bangladesh (where it is the national bird), Indonesia, Thailand, south China, Singapore and the Philippines. Many races have been described. The nominate race is found on the Indian subcontinent and has the palest females. The females of the Andamans race, *C. saularis andamensis* are darker and have heavier bills and shorter tails. The Sri Lankan race, *C. saularis ceylonensis* (which earlier included the populations of Peninsular India, south of the Kaveri River) and the southern nominate birds have females which are nearly identical to the males in colour. The Eastern populations (Bangladesh, Myanmar etc) have more black on the tail. Nearly 15 other races have been named, but many of them are not properly marked, and the status of some of them is disputed. There is usually more geographical variation in plumage among the females than in the males.

**Behaviour:** The Oriental Magpie Robin is commonly seen in open woodland, cultivated areas near human habitation, and urban gardens. It is usually seen close to the ground, either foraging among fallen leaves or perching on low branches. While doing so, they generally hold their tails cocked in an upright position. Their diet consists mainly of insects and other invertebrates, but they are known to occasionally take geckos, centipedes, leeches and even fish. They have been observed bathing in dew collected on leaves. They are often very active at dusk. In breeding season, males tend to perch on trees or other high perches and sing loudly. During this time, the males can be quite aggressive, defending their territory and responding to intruders and even their own reflections. There can be considerable variety in the calls, with the bird boasting of a repertoire of calls ranging from territorial calls to calls used during emergence and roosting, threat, submission, begging, distress and mobbing. One call can be heard here. [\[clip\]](#)

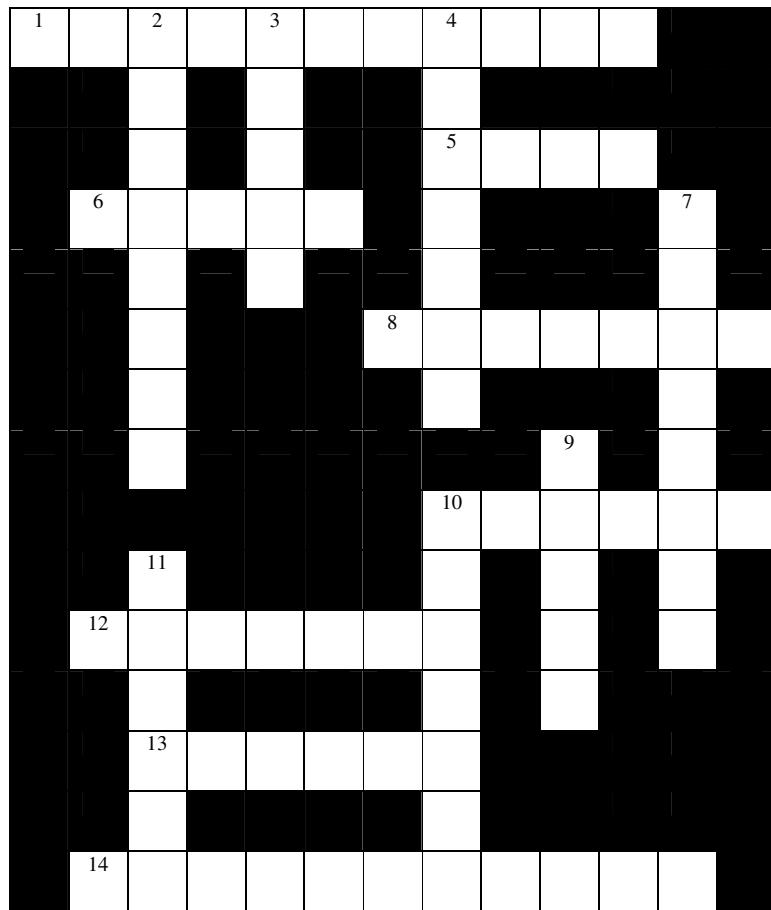
**Nesting:** The Oriental Magpie Robin breeds between March and July in India, and between January and June in South-east Asia. The display of the male includes puffing up the feathers, raising the bill, fanning the tail and strutting. Nests are built in tree hollows or small niches in walls or buildings, and are said to have a characteristic odour. The females carry out most of the nest-building activity, which happens about a week before the eggs are laid. The clutch consists of 4-5 oval eggs, which are pale blue-green and brownish-speckled, and laid at intervals of 24 hours. The female handles most of the incubation and feeding of the young, while the male spends more time on nest defence.

**Local name:** It is known as 'pedda nalanchi' or 'salara-gadu' in Telugu, 'dhaiyal' in Hindi and 'vannati-kuruvi' or 'pattukari-kuruvi' in Tamil.

## **BIRDING CROSSWORD #2**

Umesh Mani

The answers to the clues given below are bird names or other birding-related terms. Let's see how many you can find!  
(*Solutions in next month's Pitta*)



### **ACROSS**

1 These two birds team up to form one (11)  
5 Abrasive? (4)  
6 It shakes in fear (5)  
8 It started a publishing house! (7)  
10 Master magician (6)  
12 This bird nibbled at another (7)  
13 A silent, romantic fellow (5)  
14 Do they have environment-friendly legs? (11)

### **DOWN**

2 An army officer? (8)  
3 Assistant superhero! (5)  
4 This bird loves hassling others (7)  
7 Did this bird borrow another's beak? (8)  
9 Sounds like he likes snatching things (5)  
10 This one is royalty (7)  
11 He may plunge things into liquid, just for a while (6)

### **Solutions to Crossword #1 (Pitta, January 2012)**

**ACROSS:** 1 – SKUAS, 4 – CROW, 6 – SNIPES, 8 – BROOD, 9 - TWITE, 10 - TERN, 11 - STILT, 13 - HERON, 14 – STORKS, 15 – DOLLARBIRD

**DOWN:** 2 - KINGFISHER, 3 - AVOCET, 5 - WOODPECKER, 7 - SWIFT, 8 - BARBET, 12 - TEAL

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Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh  
New Series Volume 9 Number 3 March 2012

**FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 11<sup>th</sup> March 2012, 6.30AM: Ananthagiri Hills Reserve Forest.**

The day should make for not just a pleasant woodland walk, but also great birding. Ananthagiri has never disappointed and is a paradise for forest birds. One can see Flycatchers, White-eyes, Chloropsis, Orange-headed Thrush, Nightjars, among others. The Indian Pitta and the Brown Fish Owl have been reported earlier.

This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

**Trip Report – ICRISAT – 26<sup>th</sup> February 2012**

Krishna



Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar

I am a new member and this was my first birding trip as part of BSAP. When the field trip was announced, I did a quick search on the Internet and found that the 3500 acre ICRISAT campus at Patancheru has rich flora and fauna. Their website states that besides 500 species of plants, it has about 250 species of birds, 50 species of butterflies, 20 species of reptiles, and 10 species of fish <sup>[1]</sup>. So in spite of the hectic work schedule, I looked forward to this trip

with great pleasure. The last time I visited ICRISAT was as part of a high-school field trip 25 years ago.

By 6.30AM, there were already about 25 people assembled and ready at the main gate. The security at the main gate initially objected to allowing kids to be part of the team - something to take note of for future trips - but thankfully relented after multiple requests and assurances from the organizers.

We started driving at 7AM and before we could take the turn to stop at the Mary Cummins Lake (about 100 metres from the main gate), the group had already spotted the Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*), Purple Swamphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*), Green Bee-eaters (*Merops orientalis*), a Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*), and a White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*). This was turning out to be a “field” day for bird-watching!



**Black-headed Ibis** (Photo: Vijay Menon)

At the Mary Cummins lake, we saw the Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas penelope*), Spot-billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*), Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*), Paddyfield Pipit (*Anthus rufulus*), Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*), Black-rumped Flameback (*Dinopium benghalense*), Zitting Cisticola (*Cisticola juncidis*), Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus kundoo*), Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*), Black-headed Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*), Eurasian Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) and River Tern (*Sterna aurantia*).



**Black-winged Stilt** (Photo: Vijay Menon)

We also saw the Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*), Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*), Darter (*Anhinga melanogaster*), Indian Roller (*Coracias*

*benghalensis*), Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*), Lesser Whistling Duck (*Dendrocygna javanica*), Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*), Blue-tailed Bee-eater (*Merops philippinus*), Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*), Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*) Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*), and Grey Francolin (*Francolinus pondicerianus*).

We learnt that some ducks like Spot-billed Ducks, Northern Pintails (*Anas acuta*) and Garganey (*Anas querquedula*) feed on the water by upending, and hence are called ‘dabbling ducks’, whereas others, like Pochards, dive for food and hence are known as ‘diving ducks’. By this time, the crowd was excited and started dispersing to either take a closer look at the birds or capture a better photo.



**Spotted Owlet** (Photo: Vijay Menon)

We then moved towards the next lake which lies between the western border of ICRISAT and Asian Paints Ltd. Along the way we spotted the Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*). The lake had more than two hundred birds: we saw the Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*), Red-wattled and Yellow-wattled Lapwings (*Vanellus malabaricus*), Ruff (*Phylomachus pugnax*), Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*), Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*), Marsh Sandpiper (*Tringa stagnatilis*), Common Redshank (*Tringa totanus*), Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*), Bronzed-winged Jacana (*Metopidius indicus*), Jack Snipe (*Lymnocryptes minimus*), Common Coot (*Fulica atra*), Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*), Rufous-tailed Lark (*Ammomanes phoenicurus*) and a pair of Asian Pied Starlings (*Sturnus contra*).

I never thought it would be possible to see so many species of birds within such a short distance from the twin-cities.



**Black-shouldered Kite** (Photo: Vijay Menon)



**Painted Storks** (Photo: Vijay Menon)

Our next stop was at the beautiful Sunset Lake. It was already about 10 AM and it was time for a quick snack break. While munching sandwiches over hot coffee, the group noticed a Spot-billed Pelican (*Pelecanus philippensis*) in the lake which we were told has been around for the past three years or so since it cannot fly. The locals even have a name for it. We saw several Ruddy Shelducks, Black-headed Ibis, Painted Storks and Black-crowned Night Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) at the lake. The group took some time to relax, interact, and exchange notes with other members of the team. There was a discussion about the famous banana bread loaf that is available at the ICRISAT cafeteria. A quick phone call confirmed the availability and everyone made a mental note to buy one on their way out.

Next, we headed towards the Red Lake. This felt like a mini-version of Uppalapadu Bird Sanctuary near Guntur that I had visited last month. There are small islands within the Red Lake that were being used by the storks and herons for nesting. There must have been close to 100 Painted Storks nesting here. The group also spotted several Garganey, Northern Shovelers (*Anas clypeata*), Redshanks, Marsh Sandpipers, and a Pied Kingfisher patiently sitting on a wire, staring at the lake, searching for lunch.

The high-point was the Indian Spotted Eagle (*Aquila hastata*) which was gliding smoothly above us, giving all the photographers in the group a lovely opportunity to take the pictures. Did you know that the Spotted Eagle has six primaries ("fingers") while all the other raptors have seven? Some of the photographers proudly displayed the magnified pictures where we could count the primaries and confirm.

It was already 11:30 AM and time to head back home albeit a brief stopover at the cafeteria to buy the coveted banana bread loafs. Everyone had a great time and it was one of my best Sunday morning birding activities ever. The senior, experienced old-timers were very helpful with the identification and kept us busy with quizzing questions and old anecdotes. All this and the hot coffee with sandwiches, and overall conducting of the event, made it special and memorable.

The trip has raised my expectation of future BSAP events. I wish I had joined sooner.

Reference:

[1] <http://test1.icrisat.org/Media/2007/media2.htm>

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### Bird Humour



(From Times of India, 19-06-2010)

## Bird of the Month

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

### Black-rumped Flameback (*Dinopium benghalense*)



**Black-rumped Flameback** (Chennai, 29-07-2009)

Order: Piciformes

Family: Picidae

Genus: *Dinopium*

Species: *D. benghalense*

Size: 26-29 cm

**Description:** The Black-rumped Flameback is a typical woodpecker-shaped bird with vibrant colours. The back is a dark golden colour, with golden yellow wing coverts, a black rump (unlike the red rump in Greater Flameback), whitish head with black nape and a greyish eye-patch. It has white underparts with chevron markings and a black throat finely marked with white, which differentiates it from other golden-backed woodpeckers in the Indian region. It has no moustachial stripes – another diagnostic feature that sets it apart from other Flamebacks. The adult males have a red crown and crest, whereas females have a white-spotted black crown, the red being seen only on the rear crest. Young birds look like the females, but duller in colour. Like other woodpeckers, the Black-rumped Flameback also has a strong tail to gain support from the tree trunks, a straight, sharp-pointed bill, a long tongue used to capture insects, and ‘zygodactyl’ feet (two toes pointing forward and two pointing to the rear). Leucistic birds have also been recorded.

The north-western Indian sub-species, *D.b.dilutum*, has pale yellow upperparts, a longer crest and underparts that are whiter than the nominate race. The upperparts also have less spots. In the southern peninsular sub-species, *D.b.puncticollis*, the upperparts are a bright golden yellow and the black throat has small triangular white spots. The Western Ghats sub-species, sometimes separated as *D.b.tehminiae* (named after Salim Ali’s wife) is more olive above. The wing coverts are not distinct and the throat spots are fine.

The Black-rumped Flameback is found mainly in the plains up to an altitude of around 1200m in Pakistan, India (south of the Himalayas and east till about western Assam and Meghalaya), Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. It is not so common in Kutch and Rajasthan.

**Behaviour:** Usually seen in open forest and cultivation, the Black-rumped Flameback is also seen in urban green spaces. It is usually seen either in pairs or in small parties, but may sometimes join a mixed foraging flock. They tend to forage on trees starting from near the ground and moving upwards to the canopy. They feed mainly on insects, especially beetle larvae under the bark of trees, and also termites and, sometimes, nectar. At times, they may also pick up fallen fruits or food scraps. While moving up trees, they tend to circle around the trunk or branches, thus hiding themselves from potential predators. In breeding season, which varies with the weather but is usually between February and July, they tend to drum on trees more often. The Black-rumped Flameback has a piercing call, which can be heard here. [\[audio\]](#)

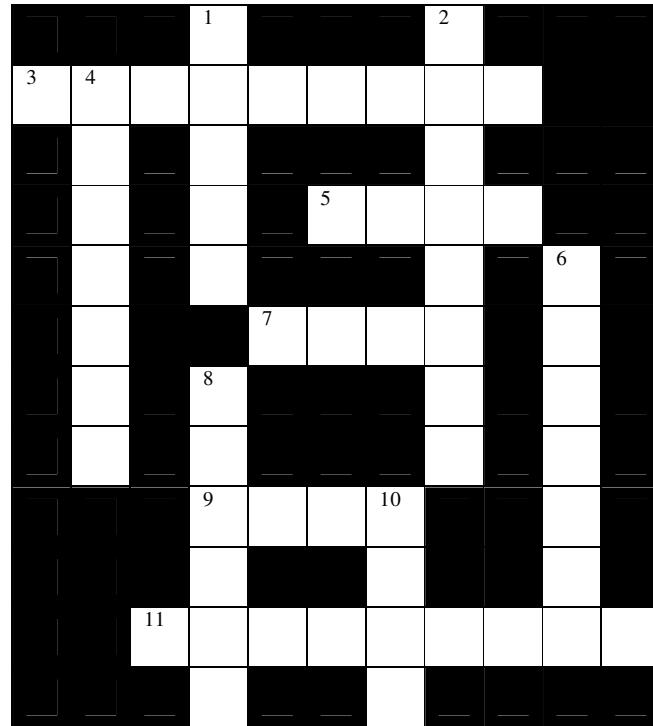
**Nesting:** The Black-rumped Flameback builds its nest by excavating a hole into the tree, which enters horizontally and then descends into a cavity. They have been known to build nests in mud embankments and also, occasionally, take over the nests of other birds. The clutch consists of three elongated, glossy white eggs, which are laid in the unlined cavity. Incubation lasts for around 11 days, and the chicks leave the nest in around 20 days.

**Local name:** It is known as ‘vadrangi pitta’ in Telugu, ‘sunahiri kathphora’ in Punjabi and ‘soneri lakkad-khod’ in Gujarati.

## **BIRDING CROSSWORD #3**

Umesh Mani

The answers to the clues given below are bird names or other birding-related terms. Let's see how many you can find!  
(*Solutions in next month's Pitta*)



### **ACROSS**

3 This bird has a built-in eating tool (9)  
5 This duck uses a hair implement? (4)  
7 A lady member of the old British naval service! (4)  
9 Get down! (4)  
11 After dark, they take these containers (9)

### **DOWN**

1 Pastime, maybe? (5)  
2 Nothing is on fire! (8)  
4 Sounds like this guy is an unlicensed hunter (7)  
6 This bird takes the cream off the top (7)  
8 Almighty sense of humour! (6)  
10 Flyer made of paper (4)

Solutions to Crossword #2 (Pitta, February 2012)

**ACROSS:** 1 – SPARROWHAWK, 5 – RUFF, 6 – QUAIL, 8 – PENGUIN, 10 - MERLIN, 12 - BITTERN, 13 - PLOVER,

14 – GREENSHANKS

**DOWN:** 2 - ADJUTANT, 3 - ROBIN, 4 - HARRIER, 7 - IBISBILL, 9 - GREBE, 10 – MONARCH, 11 - DIPPER

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### Editor's note

Between 2007 and 2009, BSAP and HSBC had organized and conducted two Bird Races with great success. This year, the Bird Race was jointly organized by the BSAP and GHAC under the HSBC programme. In this Special Issue of the Pitta, we are happy to bring you the experiences shared by four participants of this wonderful event, alongside a report by Shafaat Ulla, Hon. Secretary of BSAP and a member of the Bird Race Organizing Committee.

## **Report – HSBC Hyderabad Bird Race – 12<sup>th</sup> February 2012**

Shafaat Ulla



**At the start** (Photo: Vijay Sirdesai)

The third HSBC Bird Race was held on 12<sup>th</sup> February this year after a gap of four years. BSAP had organised these races in 2006 and 2007. Though these races generated a lot of interest and participation from our members and the public, they could not be held in the subsequent years due to various reasons. This year, the event was jointly organised by BSAP and GHAC (Great Hyderabad Adventure Club). The synergy between the two societies resulted in increased participation and additional help in organisational matters.

The Bird Race was conceived and planned by Sunjoy Monga, a naturalist, writer and photographer, in association with Mumbai-based NGO, Yuhina Eco-Media. Without the financial support extended by HSBC this event would not have been possible. In fact the Bird Race has become a signature event for HSBC, who, as part of their corporate responsibility, support activities related to conservation of nature and environment. The Bird Race is open to one and all, irrespective of age and sex and there is no entry fee. Bird Races are not only fun events, but they also generate awareness among the participants about the flora and fauna of that region.

The day of the race dawned clear and chilly. All participants gathered in front of Hyderabad Public School, Begumpet by 6.30AM. Each team was allotted a sticker with the name of a bird printed on it, which the team stuck on to their vehicles. They were given a log book and a breakfast hamper, and after a short briefing, were flagged off at 7.00AM, with instructions to return and submit the log books not later than 6.00 in the evening at Hotel Fortune Park Vallabha in

**At the start** (Photo: Vijay Sirdesai)

The organizers waited patiently for the teams to return. One by one they started trooping in and submitted their log books to the judges, namely Aasheesh, Rajeev and Moorty. Tea and biscuits were at hand to rejuvenate the tired but jubilant birders. Meanwhile the judges got busy screening the log sheets to establish the winners. Not an easy task as each log book contains six pages. Out of the 27 original entries, three teams did not show up at flag off, and of the 24 that were flagged off, only 19 returned in the evening.



The evening's function started promptly at 7.00PM. The chief guest for the evening was Mrs. Aruna Bahuguna, IPS. The other guests were Sunjoy Monga, Atul Gokhale (Vice President & Manager – Premier, HSBC, Hyderabad) and Diyanat Ali (founder member, GHAC).

After Sunjoy presented a bouquet to the chief guest, Aasheesh welcomed the gathering and thanked all the participants and GHAC for taking part in this event. Birds, he went on to mention, have held peoples' fascination from time immemorial. He said the Bird Race was a unique celebration, as birds are the most common, the most audible and the most visible species of the entire natural world and this Race brings together different facets of human enterprise like banking, eco-media, adventure sports and others.



**Aasheesh opening the proceedings** (Photo: Natasha Bali)

Sunjoy then addressed the gathering. After thanking HSBC he pointed out that the Races provide useful data regarding pollution, condition of various habitats, and decline in some species. With so many eyes looking out for birds, one often notices birds which are very rare or, perhaps, have never been recorded in the region.

Atul took over from here. After thanking the participants, he mentioned that originally it was the Hong Kong Bird Race which was adapted for our country. The first Bird Race in India was held in the year 2005 in Mumbai, when about 100 people took part. There was no looking back after that! Historically, HSBC has always taken the initiative in building awareness on environmental conservation and protection for both, the general public as well as their employees and customers.



**Sunjoy expressing his views** (Photo: Natasha Bali)

Next to speak was Diyanat. As all members of GHAC are adventurous and love to explore the wilderness, he said, bird watching had been a wonderful experience for him. From identifying 15 to 20 birds when he started, he could now identify almost 70! He expressed his and his colleagues' wholehearted support for the initiative to save birds.

Mrs. Bahuguna, a wild life enthusiast herself, then addressed the gathering. At the outset, she congratulated one and all for the wonderful concept of a Bird Race. She mentioned that



**Diyanat speaking to the group** (Photo: Natasha Bali)

birds play a very important role in the ecology and have been involved with our religion and culture for thousands of years. A regular visitor to Pulicat and Nelapattu, she said that she is fascinated by the pelicans and flamingos and never tires of watching nesting birds and their parental behaviour. She, however, cautioned that indiscriminate tourism can also harm birds and stressed on the need for moderation. She attributed the decrease in the numbers of sparrows and koels to urbanisation and the use of plastic and pesticides. She hoped that the awareness created through such events continued in future too.



**Aruna Bahuguna addressing the gathering** (Photo: Ravi)

The participants were then requested to share their experiences. This was a very lively session and everyone enjoyed it thoroughly. In fact, Mrs. Bahuguna, who was to leave early, changed her mind and listened keenly to the participants.

The 'OWLS' spoke first. The team comprised of two couples, Sohani-Vrushal and Richa-Anurag. The foursome on two bikes enjoyed the experience thoroughly. They said the permissions obtained in advance were very useful.

Nishant (13) of TERNS spoke very well and felt the time just flew. It was a good learning experience for him. He promised to participate the following year along with his classmates. Raghav (14) of FALCONS had never seen so many birds and was fascinated by the Painted Storks and the Ruddy Shelducks.

Vineet (12) and Dipti (10) of the STORKS had participated in the Mumbai Bird Race and enjoyed this Race too. They had birded in Manjeera Barrage and ICRISAT. They saw Lapwings but missed seeing sparrows. Yes, we all do, don't we?

The EAGLES were lead by Vijay, who came with his wife and two teen-aged sons, Vidish and Vihan. They went to Narsapur forest and then to ICRISAT. Vijay gave us a good account of their outing.

Rahul and Monica of ROBINS were accompanied by their daughter Arohini (7). It was remarkable that she was with them throughout the day as well as the entire evening without any fuss.

Team PELICANS was next. Sakina came up – full of life and humour. They went to Durgam Cheruvu and met a couple of guys, who they thought were the participants. They all decided to bird together. It was then discovered that these guys were 'bouldering' and not birding. A comedy of errors!

Next to come up were the CRANES. Natasha said that she had been bitten by the birding bug and would take it up seriously. She intends to buy a book on birds and learn more about them.

A few more spoke. Mel of GEESE, Keku of HERONS and Kalpana and Jayati of GULLS.

As Aasheesh announced the winners, Mrs. Bahuguna gave away the prizes:

3<sup>rd</sup> Prize:

ROBINS (Sivaji, Rahul, Baby Arohini, Monica, Bindu)

Total no. of species: **109**

Bird of the day: INDIAN COURSER (*Cursorius coromandelicus*)

2<sup>nd</sup> Prize:

MUNIAS (Mahipal, Nilay, Yokesh, Amritpal)

Total no. of species: **123**

Bird of the day: PALLID HARRIER (*Circus macrourus*)

1<sup>st</sup> Prize:

EAGLES (Vijay, Vidya, Vidish, Vihan)

Total no. of species: **142**

Bird of the day: ULTRAMARINE FLYCATCHER (*Ficedula superciliaris*)



Team ROBINS (Photo: Ravi)



Team MUNIAS (Photo: Natasha Bali)



Team EAGLES (Photo: Ravi)

The judges had a tough time deciding the '**Bird of the Day**'. The contest was between the Lesser Adjutant and the Ultramarine Flycatcher. The Lesser Adjutant (*Leptoptilos javanicus*) is quite rare and was seen at ICRISAT by Nishant, Velu, Purshottam and Trishla of the HAWKS. However, after considerable deliberations, the judges decided that the '**Bird of the Day**' was the **Ultramarine Flycatcher** spotted by the EAGLES – Vijay and his family.

Aasheesh declared that the total number of species seen during the race was **204**, a very satisfying figure. He also mentioned that the judges had a tough time judging the entries. They had to disallow some of the entries after discussing them with the individual teams. Praising the participants, he said that all readily accepted the judges' verdict, without argument. This is the spirit which is fundamental to the success of the Race.



**Amardeep giving the Vote of Thanks**

(Photo: Natasha Bali)



**The judges at work** (Photo: Natasha Bali)

After the prizes were distributed, Atul, on behalf of HSBC, gave away mementos to the judges and the organisers as a token of appreciation.

The Vote of Thanks was given by Amardeep. He thanked the Chief Guest, the Forest Department, HSBC, Sunjoy, Atul, the organising team, judges, ICRISAT, Joby Joseph of the University of Hyderabad, the media, the participants and, finally, the hotel for the lovely arrangements.

Dinner was a sumptuous affair. Soon, a memorable day came to an end, but not before every one promising to come again next year. Well, let us say cheers to that!

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### **Where Eagles Dare**

Vidish V Sirdesai

12-02-2012 dawned. It was the day we were all eagerly waiting for. It was the day of the Bird Race and this was going to be my first bird watching trip with my family, especially with my Mom and my younger brother Vihan.

We were up and awake at 05:00 and by 06:15, we reached Hyderabad Public School with our binoculars and cameras. We were given our log sheet and the copies of permission letters from various authorities. I think it's my Dad's love for raptors that got our team its name - "EAGLES". It also proved to be lucky for us.

At around 06:45 our family of eagles took flight and soared towards Narsapur Forest - our first stop. Our first bird on the list was the Black Kite. All along the drive to Narsapur, I wrote the names of the birds we saw, and by the time we reached Narsapur we had about 18 species on the list. We parked near the '*mandir*', armed ourselves with binoculars and cameras, and set out into the forest. My mom warned my dad to do less photography and more bird watching. My dad humbly obliged and gave his camera to my kid brother who was very happy to have it and clicked away to glory.

We went behind the '*mandir*', up to a small dry stream bed which had a lot of shrubs and trees and a lot of bird life. Most of them were new to novices like us and very common to my dad. Here we saw a beautiful small yellow bird, the White-eye on a dry tree with clusters of yellow / orange flowers - Flame of the Forest. As my father called out names of the birds, I jotted them down. He suddenly asked for the camera and took some quick shots of a blue bird and all he said was "I think we have the Bird of the Day"! Not sure what it was he just asked me to write 'flycatcher'. Mom's sharp eyes caught two large birds with long white necks and she wondered if they were vultures. "Woolly-necked Stork", came the reply.

After spending a little more time and adding to the list, we crossed the road and went into the forest and after a long walk came to an open area. Here we met Shivaji uncle with his team and Kiran uncle and team. After breakfast near the temple we went to the lake at Narsapur. A few more additions followed here, bringing our total to over 60 species. Satisfied, we drove to the birdwatchers' paradise around Hyderabad - ICRISAT.

Following Shivaji uncle and team (as Dad did not know the shorter route) we reached ICRISAT. A few formalities at the gate and we were off, stopping at every water body, open field and forest. There were birds - and more birds everywhere and that

meant more and more of writing for me. But I was only too happy to do it. The largest lake had the maximum number of birds - Ducks, Geese, Cormorants, Harriers - the list kept swelling. Here we stopped for a quick snack, and then went to the Red Lake with 3 small islands. A little time here and we were on our way out and headed for the finish line. With a tally of 142 species, the "Eagles" perched on top of the podium. After the awards ceremony, prize distribution and the lavish dinner, the Eagles headed home to roost.

Thanks HSBC, BSAP, GHAC and all individuals for making this event a success. I'm already looking forward to the next race.

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### **A Bird Race On A Sunday**

Natasha Bali



Photo: Amardeep Singh

A Sunday morning can be rough on few, especially when you haven't had your share of sleep the night before. Unfortunately this was the case for me. I woke up feeling tired, unrested and full of ideas on how to skip the Bird Race. But then I decided to get ready anyways, guilt taking over. Trilok called to inform me that he would be reaching my place in 5 minutes. I picked my bags and quietly shut the door behind me. It was time to watch some birds now and I knew I would have fun doing it.

The event we were going for was the HSBC Hyderabad Bird Race 2012, with BSAP. Location – Begumpet, right outside Hyderabad Public School. This was to be our starting point. I had no understanding of the event at this point. 'A Bird Race! What could it possibly mean?' I marveled. The atmosphere was quite jovial, good team spirit was visible and the excitement in the air just kept multiplying. For me, I was simply glad to be witnessing it all. The organizers began distributing the team kits. It looked nothing like I had expected, to say the least. It comprised of paper sheets having bird names on it, a pen, glue stick and breakfast for the team. "How are we going to catch birds with a pen and a glue stick? Where is the net? Maybe we will lure them with our breakfast first and then...Wait, it makes no sense, plus it sounds very cruel." I had serious doubts about my theory and decided to get some help.



Photo: Natasha Bali

We were a team of four; the other 3 team members were Trilok, Amardeep and Diyanat. Trilok, like me, had no clue. Amardeep was on his way; well I have heard that before. Typically, if you are late on a weekend meetup event you start saying "I'm on my way", pretty much the minute you wake up! So it was Diyanat, who explained in detail about the event. Once he was done, I chose not to share my version of the event with him - not only did I risk looking idiotic, but it also sounded too cruel. In my defense the term "Bird Race" could be very misleading for a first timer and if it's still not good enough an excuse, it was Sunday for god's sake! I never think straight on a Sunday morning and I'm never apologetic about it. So there, you have it.

At sharp 7 o'clock the race began. Our task was to spot as many birds as we could, from the list. No nets and no gluing the birds to capture them, simply spotting them and marking them as seen or heard on the given list. "That's it?" I asked, looking at Diyanat. "Why even bother going anywhere looking for them, I mean we could stand here and tick all of them as seen, right now." "Ah! But the judges are smart you see. They had thrown in couple of rare birds in the list, so you would be caught immediately. Plus, what's the fun in doing that and who cares who wins, we all enjoy bird watching and that's why we are here, that's it." I knew what he would say; it's what any member of the GHAC family would have said. I wondered why I even bothered asking him in the first place.

And bird watching we did, starting from Lotus Pond and later covering Durgam Cheruvu, Botanical Garden and Hyderabad University. Bird watching was new to me but that did not make me any less enthusiastic. The only difference is that if a bird flew past me I would probably go "What is that! What is that", contrary to a pro birdwatcher, who even when in doubt would have 2 or 3 bird names tripping off his tongue immediately. How do they do that, I wondered. My favorite bird was the Green Bee-eater; it is a delicate looking bird with lovely colors. I didn't know how much I liked this little creature, until I realized that every time I vaguely pointed to a bird and expectantly looked at my team members to identify it for me, it ended up being a Bee-eater. Coincidentally we also named the Green Bee-eater the 'Bird of the Day'.

We ended our bird watching marathon at ICRISAT and it couldn't have been more perfect. We could have spent days bird watching inside the campus and still not tire of it. I was glad that these poor creatures still had a safe haven in ICRISAT.

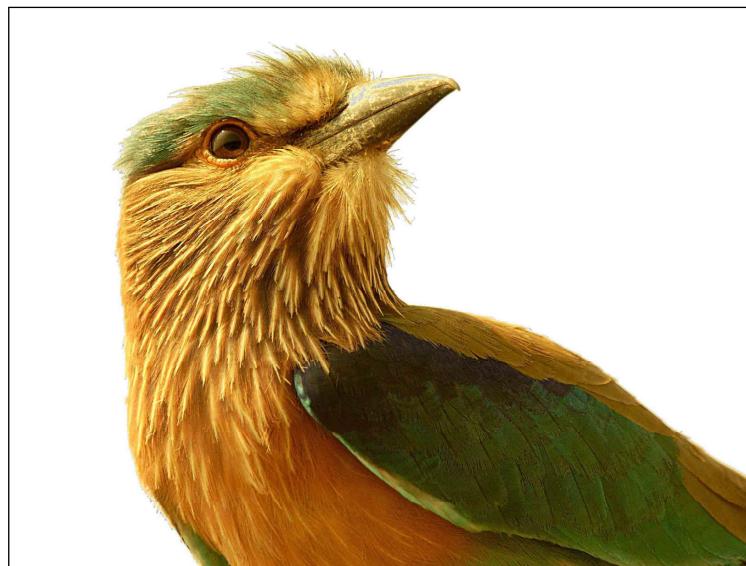
Once the race ended, we were eager to report back. We did say winning doesn't matter but if we did win, it wouldn't have hurt. We headed straight to Fortune Hotel and submitted our list to a panel of judges who were equally eager to meet us. The gracious judges shared their bird watching experiences with us. It was heartening to see so many people taking time out to share their mutual love for these wonderful little creatures. I was also saddened when I got to know that a bird as common as the sparrow was slowly disappearing. Later that evening, the winners were announced. I went home with a sense of achievement. I had not won the Bird Race, but I had acquired something far more rewarding - a new hobby – Bird watching!



Photo: Natasha Bali

### **HSBC Hyderabad Bird Race – A Report**

Text & photos: Mahipal



Indian Roller

The sun was just rising on a chilly Sunday morning, when a large group of bird watchers gathered outside Hyderabad Public School for a Bird Race. Though new to the Race, we did know that it involved identifying as many species as possible around Hyderabad in a span of 12 hours. There was excitement and anticipation in the air.

There were around 125 participants divided into 25 groups. Organizers had given the required information well in advance. Permission letters to areas like ICRISAT and HCU were given to participants. Teams were named after birds. Our team was named 'Munias'. The event was flagged off at 7.00 as planned.

As our team of four - Nilay, Yokesh, Amrit and me – made our way to ICRISAT, we hoped to see almost all the birds in the logbook! After spotting some common birds, we found a small bird close to us, flitting amidst the branches. Yokesh identified it as a Redstart. He was knowledgeable about the birds at ICRISAT and was carrying the book by Tom Hash, "Birds of ICRISAT".



**Northern Pintail, Red-wattled Lapwing, Purple Swamphen, Northern Shoveler**

The Red Lake was full of ducks and waders. There were many winter migrants - Comb Duck, Mallard, Garganey and Ruddy Shelduck, to name a few. We also spotted the Tawny Eagle, Marsh Harrier and the White-eyed Buzzard. Undoubtedly ICRISAT is a great place for birds. As Amrit enthusiastically pointed out the birds, Nilay cross-checked them in the field guides.



**Comb Duck**



**White-eyed Buzzard**

Realizing that we had spent too much time at ICRISAT, we rushed to Hyderabad Central University. The Peacock Lake in HCU has many water birds. We were not disappointed and even spotted a Pallid Harrier, our bird of the day, a Lesser Spotted Eagle, some Shrikes and other common birds.



**Ruddy Shelduck**



**Black Kite**

Time was running out and there were no flycatchers on our list. As a last resort we headed to Acharya NG Ranga Agricultural University (ANGRAU). The guest house area has some tall trees and a stream beside it. We spotted the Tickell's Blue Flycatcher and the Common Kestrel, among others.



**Common Stonechat**

We finally headed back to Hotel Fortune for the prize distribution ceremony. The chief guest, Mrs Aruna Bahuguna, IPS, gave us some interesting facts about wild life and conservation. Mr. Sunjoy Monga gave a very interesting speech about bird races in different Indian cities. Prizes were announced - Vijay Sirdesai's team stood first with a count of 144, we stood second with 123 species and Shivaji's team came third with a count of 109.

For us the Bird Race was not just about the number of birds sighted. We learnt a lot more about birds on that day.



**Indian Grey Hornbill**

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**For Private Circulation Only**

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**Society membership** (in Rs.): Admission: 100; Annual: 400 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh  
New Series Volume 9 Number 4 April 2012

### **FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 15<sup>th</sup> April 2012, 6.00AM: Nehru Zoological Park, Mir Alam.**

When not watching the creatures in the cages, one can discover that the zoo is actually a good place for bird watching. The lions' enclosure and the various tanks hold lot of ground and small birds and a number of water birds. Stone Curlews have been known to breed near the Sambhar enclosure. By March-April migrants begin withdrawing, so one can expect to see some stragglers still around. Earlier trips have given us interesting sightings and observations, and this one may throw up a few surprises as well.

This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

### **INDOOR MEETING: THE SPLENDOUR OF AUSTRALIAN BIRDS**

**Thursday, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2012, 6.00PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 2, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034.** (Goethe-Zentrum has now moved to Banjara Hills. For any clarifications on the new address, please contact 94905-09251)

From the archives of esteemed wildlife filmmaker, Bettina Dalton and the Absolutely Wild Visuals catalogue comes the definitive collection of Australian birdlife, shot on various locations around the country and featuring some never-before-seen footage of common, exotic, endangered and, even extinct species of Australian birds. In addition, this collection includes footage from the renowned Densey Clyne collection, as well as a beautiful montage of bird footage set to music, created especially for this superb collection.

### **Trip Report – Ananthagiri Hills – 11<sup>th</sup> March 2012**

Shaaz



Orange-headed Thrush (Photo: Asif Husain)

11<sup>th</sup> March, for me, will always be a day to remember, as it was on this day that I was introduced to a whole new

world of birding! It was my first birding experience and I fell completely in love with it!



**Black-shouldered Kite** (Photo: Asif Husain)

I started early in the morning for Ananthagiri Hills with Asif, Surekha and Vinay. I didn't have to wait till Anantagiri to start birding as Asif was already helping us to identify birds on our way. The first bird to be spotted was the Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*) followed by Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) and Spotted Doves (*Streptopelia chinensis*). Sitting quietly on the electric wires, the Black-shouldered Kite stared at us, its beautiful eyes mesmerising me. We finally reached Ananthagiri at around 7.15AM, where Shafaat uncle, along with other BSAP members, was waiting for us. I was introduced to everyone and was excited to kick-start my first birding experience!

huge numbers and were easily spotted. Moving further, we all were excited to see the Black-rumped Flameback (*Dinopium benghalense*) and the Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*). I was excited like a small kid on seeing the Woodpecker for the first-time. It was then that I realised the amazement and beauty of the world of birds! It took me into a totally different world and I started enjoying every second of bird watching.



**Tickell's Blue Flycatcher**  
(Photo: Anand Kalinadhabhatla)

As we continued gazing I was constantly given tips and techniques on using the binoculars and remembering the names of birds by Shafaat uncle and Asif. They also explained the use of the field guide and how to identify the bird using it. Heading further into the forest we saw the Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyceros birostris*), Spotted Doves, Red-vented Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*), White-browed Fantails (*Rhipidura aureola*) and Black Drongos (*Dicrurus macrocercus*).

The Orange-headed Thrush (*Zoothera citrina*) was amazingly beautiful and was captured by our photographers - Asif and Rahul. I was excited to see its bright colours and the beautiful stripes near the eyes.



**Oriental Magpie Robin** (Photo: Anand Kalinadhabhatla)

We first spotted Common Mynas (*Acridotheres tristis*), the Asian Koel (*Eudynamys scolopacea*), and Yellow-billed Babblers (*Turdoides affinis*). The Babblers were in



**Rufous Treepie** (Photo: Asif Husain)

Other birds sighted were the Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*), Rufous Treepie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*), and Rose-ringed Parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*). It was while trying to spot these parakeets that I realised one needs to have a keen sense of observation while spotting these birds as they are so well camouflaged.

Finally we all were exhausted and took rest under the shade of the huge tree. This piece of land was surrounded by Eucalyptus trees which have their distinctive odour. We had our breakfast as it was already past 10.00AM. Some others were busy with their cameras in the forest.



**Bay-backed Shrike** (Photo: Vinay Akula)

Further into the forest we spotted the Bay-backed Shrike (*Lanius vittatus*) which gave a wonderful pose as if it was deliberately sitting there waiting for us to see it. Needless

to say the men with their cameras clicked away. At this point two other members, Chandrasheker and Yokesh, joined us. Yokesh was flaunting his brand-new camera and sharing his pictures of a snake, only to realise later that it was a COBRA!

Later we all returned to our big tree where Shafaat uncle was waiting for all of us to gather. On our way back, we felt blessed to spot the male Asian Paradise-flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*) in its breeding plumage.



**Asian Paradise-flycatcher Male Adult (Top) and Immature (Above)** (Photo: Asif Husain)



**Chestnut-headed Bee-eater**  
(Photo: Anand Kalinadhabhatla)

The trip to Ananthagiri was full of surprises and excitement. We spotted approximately 30 birds and it was a great learning experience! Everyone was more than happy to share their knowledge and experience and welcome a new member.

The trip ended with yummy home-made ‘samosas’ that Asif had brought for all of us. After finishing them off,

we all packed our bags and returned home with wonderful avian memories.



**Crested Treeswift**  
(Photo: Anand Kalinadhabhatla)

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**Report – AP Forest Dept-BSAP Peafowl Census**  
**KBR National Park – 18<sup>th</sup> March 2012**  
Text: Anjali Pande; Photos: Dr G Samuel Sukumar



**Indian Peafowl (Male)**

No. of participants: 28, Teams: 10

It was a pleasant morning at KBR Park. Looking a little different from the regular crowd of morning walkers, we waited at the main entrance. Some walkers assumed that we were “presswallas” and that our presence there meant that some “VIP” was coming. On enquiry we turned out to be mere birdwatchers, thereby causing a little disappointment among the curious onlookers.

Gradually some more people wearing sport shoes, caps and wildlife jackets started to assemble. On recognizing each other as “those who want to count Peacocks”, we all went inside the park. In the little Information Centre, we were greeted by Mr. Shankaran and Mr. Narasimha Reddy. They briefed all the participants of the first-ever Peafowl Census organized by the Forest Department. The motivation behind this exercise was a constant query from park visitors “How many Peacocks are there?” or sometimes the worried complaint of some visitors “Last time we saw more Peacocks, Sir. Is their number decreasing?” Through this census, they hoped that these questions would be answered.



**Mr Shankaran and Mr Srinivas Reddy of the Forest Dept with Shafaat Ulla (L) and Aasheesh Pittie (R)**

Volunteers from BSAP were present along with participants from GHAC and WWF. Mr. Shankaran told us that we would be divided in 10 teams, each team would be assigned one area and one Forest Guard would accompany us for guidance. He also briefed us on the technique to be used for counting and the documentation of the count.

Everyone was already in the “counting” mode and started watching one male Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) that graced us with his splendid presence, resplendent tail feathers and all. Calls of Grey Francolins (*Francolinus pondicerianus*), Spotted Doves (*Streptopelia chinensis*) and Red-vented Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*) signaled the

start of bird activity around us. While Aasheesh and Shafaat uncle got busy dividing the 28 participants into 10 teams and assigning them areas, participants had bananas to tank up energy for the next two hours.

There were 10 different routes, out of which 4 routes passed through that area of the park which is open to all visitors. Rest of the routes covered areas which are part of the conservation zones. These conservation areas are not accessible to the general public and like any National Park, the Forest Department carries out its monitoring and conservation activities here.

Having a National Park in the middle of a metropolis of seven million is a miracle. This oasis shelters 133 bird species in addition to other flora and fauna. KBR Park, which was once called Chiran Palace, is also a sanctuary for our precious national bird - the Indian Peafowl. There is even a palace named ‘Mor Palace’ (i.e. Peacock Palace) that belonged to Prince Mukarram Jah’s palace complex, which establishes the fact that Peafowl has been abundant in this area. This park finds itself on the HMDA heritage list due to its natural rock formations, its flora and fauna, the lake in the park and the Chiran Palace. An area of about 142.50 hectare was waiting for us to look for the Indian Peafowl.



**Indian Silverbills**

All the teams started at 7.30AM and were asked to report back by 10.00AM. My team set out on route number 10 which went across the southern conservation zone. We were determined not to start birding, as we had a mission to accomplish. But once a birder always a birder! Soon we sighted Indian Silverbills (*Lonchura malabarica*) and Common Ioras (*Aegithina tiphia*) on our way to the starting point. As per instructions we reached our starting point near the palace and began looking out for Peafowl on either side of the path. The first Peafowl sighting was near a shelter of the Forest Guards, which seemed to be a favorite feeding place. The number of birds was diligently noted down.

Further on the trek we came across a big well where a pair of Spotted Owlets (*Athene brama*) was roosting. A small lake on the way provided some more Peafowl along with Red-wattled Lapwings (*Vanellus indicus*), White-throated Kingfishers (*Halcyon smyrnensis*), Little Grebes (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) and one Bronze-Winged Jacana (*Metopidius indicus*). One lone Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*) flew along the edge of the water body.



**Spotted Owllet**



**Indian Peafowl (Female)**

We kept walking, counting and looking for more Peafowl. Strangely till now we had sighted only Peacocks and there was an understandable concern in the team about the sex ratio being as skewed as that of *homo sapiens*. But soon enough we were happy to see some Peahens near one end

of the water body. The future of the Peafowl seemed safe at least in this park.

There were some big holes dug into the loose sandy earth on the ground which were those of porcupines, but we did not actually sight any of them. By now it was already getting a bit warm and one male Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) was sighted. Our route took us back to the starting point along the other side of the palace area. After adding some more Peafowl to our list, we reached the point where we had started in the morning. It was about 10.00AM and we decided to get back to the Information Centre.

All the teams arrived one by one and all the count lists were collected and bird lists were also handed over. Our bird list had 20 species on it. Mr. Shankaran thanked all the participants. Aasheesh also proposed a vote of thanks to the Forest Department and to all the officials and guards who helped us. There was a suggestion about taking up a count again in the evening at one roosting place of the Peafowl in the area covered by route number 9, which was readily accepted. The final count stood at 136, out of which 56 were Peahens, 75 Peacocks and 5 juveniles. Route number 1, which was across the visitors' area, recorded maximum sightings of juveniles.

While chatting with other groups about their encounters with birds, mammals (mongoose and hare) and in one case, a snake, there was a request for a group photograph to mark the end of this first ever Peafowl Census in KBR Park. I am sure we all carried home many nice moments from our day at this "Jungle in the Urban Jungle".



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## Some observations on the differences in nesting periods of the Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*) around Hyderabad

Text and photos: Humayun Taher



Adult Little Ringed Plover

On Sunday, 4<sup>th</sup> March 2012 a friend and I were birding in the vicinity of Pocharam Lake (18° 8' 8.88"N, 78° 10' 55.18"E). I was sitting close to the lake shore and trying to take some photographs of a pair of Little Ringed Plovers that were running around in this area. I observed that the plovers kept circling one particular area and their behaviour plainly showed that there was something in this area that the birds were anxious about. A few moments later, I saw a chick running beside the adults. I immediately looked around to see if there were any herons, crows or terns in the vicinity (these three species can and occasionally do take young chicks). Seeing the area clear, I then approached closer to try and photograph the young bird.



Chick seen on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2011 at Narsapur

Meanwhile, my friend also observed the chick and came towards it. As he was walking in the direction of the chick, one of the adult plovers indulged in a "broken-

wing-display" in front of him. This action, I could not see as I was fully engaged in observing the behaviour of the chick, which was squatting on the ground, absolutely immobile and blending so well with the surroundings that it was almost impossible to spot unless you knew exactly where it was.

We took some photographs and then left the area quickly so as to avoid stressing and disturbing the young bird too much. Young wading birds are very vulnerable at this stage and they do have several predators in the form of hawks, gulls, terns, herons and crows; of which herons and terns were in the vicinity and could have predated the young bird. Looking around from a distance, I saw the young bird rejoin the adults and run into the shelter of some long grass growing by the lake-shore.

One reason I was most interested in this sighting was that I remembered seeing a young Little Ringed Plover (of almost the same age as this one) in Narsapur last year. On returning home, I looked through my notes and found that that sighting had taken place on the 5<sup>th</sup> of June last year (5<sup>th</sup> June 2011). This seemed to me to be quite a range for the breeding season so I started to look through existing literature to see what I could find. Salim Ali and Dillon Ripley in their Handbook give a fairly extensive range for the species; as follows "...in continental and peninsular India chiefly March to May; in South India, December to June, chiefly March, April and May..." (Ali & Ripley, 1987).



Chick seen on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2012 at Pocharam

The above passage shows that the nesting period of the species is quite long-drawn out (December through to June encompasses some 7 months). It, however, fits in very well with my records of a chick seen in the first week of June last year and this sighting in the first week of March. Considering this, I did not look much further, although I did find a passage on the Internet which said “Reproduction: April – June in Europe, March – May in North Africa, March – May in South India” (<http://www.planetofbirds.com/charadriiformes-charadriidae-little-ringed-plover-charadrius-dubius>).

In view of these passages, it seems likely that the birds breed at different times even within the confines of a single region. Narsapur forest (where we saw the chick in 2011) is not more than about 50 kilometres from the Pocharam Lake. It is open to conjecture whether there may be additional records coming in from different parts of the district in the coming months.

One other point, which I feel worthy of mention here is that Salim Ali and Ripley state that the clutch size is up to 4 eggs. This number is also repeated in the passage from the internet quoted above. In none of the references, nor in any of the other sources I have referred, is there any mention of the fledgling statistics. Ali and Ripley state that “Both sexes share in incubation and tending the chicks”. The use of the plural is interesting inasmuch as, in both cases where I have observed adults with the young, there has only been a single chick present with the adults. Whether this is a normal state, or whether the fledgling rate is dependent on extraneous factors such as food

availability, is a question I do not at present feel qualified to answer satisfactorily.



**Broken-wing display by Adult**

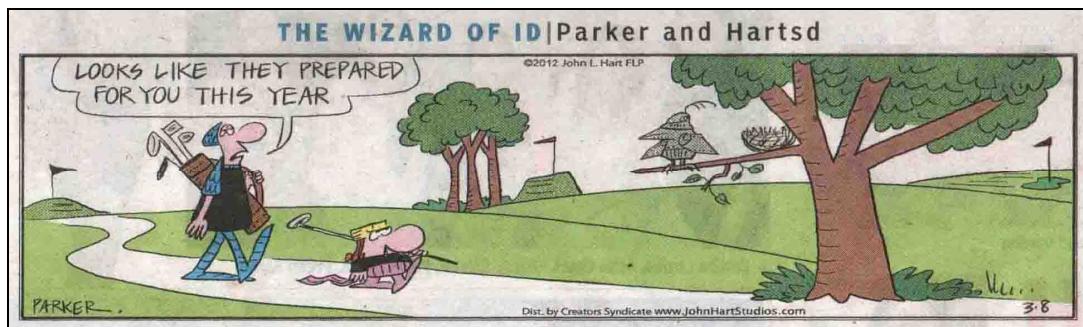
It remains to mention that even so commonplace an occurrence as the sighting of a reasonably common species can give rise to interesting speculations. More material from other members would be of great interest to me to see if a pattern may emerge on the breeding of the Little Ringed Plover around Hyderabad.

#### References:

- 1) Ali S and Ripley S D (1987): Compact Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan; Second Edition, Oxford University Press, Delhi.
- 2) Anonymous (Internet): <http://www.planetofbirds.com/charadriiformes-charadriidae-little-ringed-plover-charadrius-dubius>

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#### Bird Humour



(From Deccan Chronicle, 09-03-2012 – contributed by Shafaat Ulla)

## **Bird of the Month**

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

### **Brown-headed Barbet (*Megalaima zeylanica*)**



**Brown-headed Barbet**

(Chandigarh, 29-07-2009)

Order: Piciformes

Family: Megalaimidae

Genus: *Megalaima*

Species: *M. zeylanica*

Size: 27 cm

**Description:** A plump bird with a large head, short neck and tail, the Brown-headed Barbet is one of the larger Asian barbets. The adult bird has a streaked head, neck and breast, a stout reddish bill and a prominent yellow eye-patch. The rest of the plumage is green. The barbets get their name from the bristles ('barbs') which are found fringing their heavy bills. The sexes are similar.

In the Western Ghats and hilly parts of southern peninsular India, the Brown-headed Barbet is generally replaced by the White-cheeked Barbet (*Megalaima viridis*). There are many areas where both species may be seen, and they also have similar calls, so the main diagnostic feature is a prominent white cheek patch seen in the White-cheeked Barbet.

**Behaviour:** A resident breeder in India and Sri Lanka, the Brown-headed Barbet is arboreal, usually found in wooded country, urban and country gardens, though it tends to avoid thick forest. It is usually seen singly or in pairs, though at times it may form part of a mixed hunting party. It feeds on fruit and insects, but generally favours fruits like mango, jackfruit, papaya, banana, and other cultivated fruit trees.

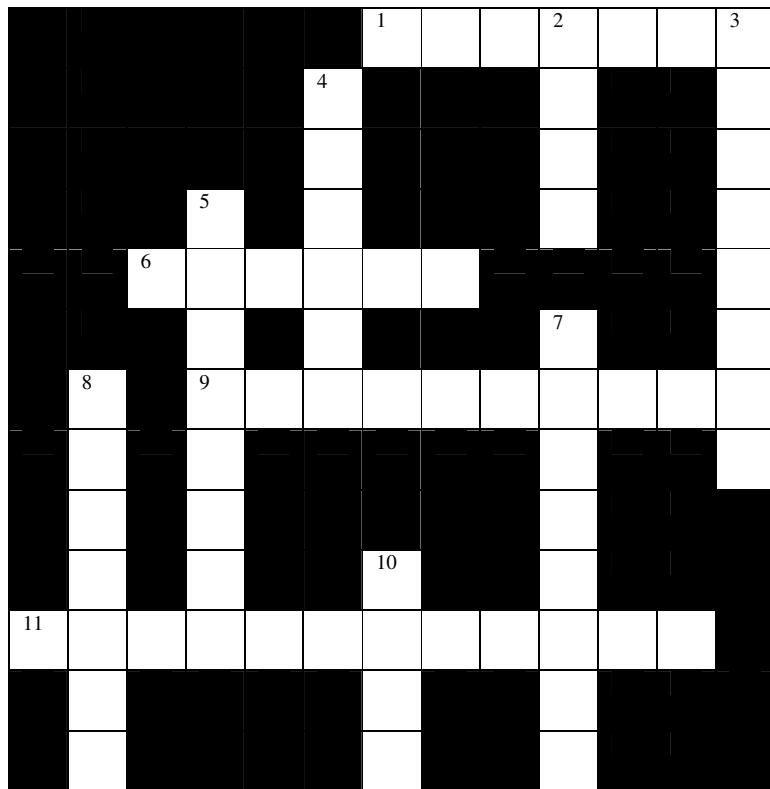
The Brown-headed Barbet has a repetitive *kutroo...kutroo...kutroo* call, which can be heard here. Other individuals tend to take up the call when one stops making it. It is relatively quiet in the winter.

**Nesting:** The Brown-headed Barbet nests in suitable hollows in a tree, which it may excavate out further if required. A typical clutch is 2-4 eggs, and the parents take it in turns to incubate the eggs. At this time, they tend to communicate quietly, emitting a different *kura...kura...* call.

## **BIRDING CROSSWORD #4**

Umesh Mani

The answers to the clues given below are bird names or other birding-related terms. Let's see how many you can find!  
(*Solutions in next month's Pitta*)



### **ACROSS**

- 1 Believe or gulp it down (7)
- 6 This bird is cruel to begin with (6)
- 9 Term of endearment for someone who shows the way (10)
- 11 Caste-conscious raptor? (8,4)

### **DOWN**

- 2 Sounds like a shark on a merry frolic (4)
- 3 Sudden urge to be free without convenience (8)
- 4 Make repeated demands to join the endless line (6)
- 5 New roof material, or crazy opening on the deck? (8)
- 7 A water bird calling an unqualified doctor? (8)
- 8 During boxing practice, lose jewellery and pick up a fight (7)
- 10 Sounds like it is not in a tangle (4)

Solutions to Crossword #3 (Pitta, March 2012)

**ACROSS:** 3 – SPOONBILL, 5 – COMB (DUCK), 7 – WREN, 9 – DUCK, 11 – NIGHTJARS

**DOWN:** 1 - HOBBY, 2 - FLAMINGO, 4 - POCHARD, 6 - SKIMMER, 8 - GODWIT, 10 – KITE

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**For Private Circulation Only**

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**For information, write to:** Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** [http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap\\_online](http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online). **Website:** [www.bsap.in](http://www.bsap.in). **Society membership** (in Rs.): Admission: 100; Annual: 400 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh  
New Series Volume 9 Number 5 May 2012

### **FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2012, 6.00AM: Sanjeevaiah Park, Secunderabad.**

Spread out over 90 acres, this park, abutting the Hussain Sagar Lake in the heart of the city, is a great spot for birding. Though the migrants would have long gone by now, sightings of a number of resident species make for a fruitful summer morning. The shady trees offer refuge to quite a few birds. Many of them should be nesting now, especially the Orioles, Sunbirds, Drongos, Asian Pied Starlings, etc. Leafbirds have been seen occasionally, so also Coppersmiths. The lakeshore should offer some waders and it may be possible to glimpse some Terns and Gulls.

This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

### **INDOOR MEETING: THE SPLENDOUR OF AUSTRALIAN BIRDS, Part-2**

**Thursday, 24<sup>th</sup> May 2012, 6.00PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034.** (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443)

From the archives of esteemed wildlife filmmaker, Bettina Dalton and the Absolutely Wild Visuals catalogue comes the definitive collection of Australian birdlife, shot on various locations around the country and featuring some never-before-seen footage of common, exotic, endangered and, even extinct species of Australian birds. In addition, this collection includes footage from the renowned Densey Clyne collection, as well as a beautiful montage of bird footage set to music, created especially for this superb collection.

### **Trip Report – Nehru Zoological Park – 15<sup>th</sup> April 2012**

Text: Bindu Madhavi Racherla, Photos: Humayun Taher



**Spotted Owlet**

On 15<sup>th</sup> April 2012, around 12 of us (BSAP members) headed to Nehru Zoological Park, Mir Alam. Spread over 380 acres, NZP houses a large number of species of birds and animals. It provides an open naturalistic enclosure

where the animals may display their natural behaviour (Open-moated design enclosure) and also keeps the animals from escaping.

Mr.M.A Waheed, Curator of the Nehru Zoological Park was our host and guide during the trip. As we entered the gate, we were welcomed by Yellow-billed Babblers (*Turdoides affinis*), Large Grey Babblers (*Turdoides malcolmi*) and Common Mynas (*Acridotheres tristis*) sitting on the carpet grass, and Rose-ringed Parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*) flying across.



**Common Hawk Cuckoo**

As we walked down the narrow path near the Zoo office, our attention was drawn towards a Common Hawk Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*) sitting on the lower branch of a large tree. At first I mistook it for a Shikra (*Accipiter badius*), but as we approached closer, the distinctive nose, brown bars on the breast and broadly barred tail of the Common Hawk Cuckoo were clearly visible.



**Intermediate Egret**

As we walked along, we noticed commoners like Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*), Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*), Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*), Asian Koel

(*Eudynamys scolopaceus*), Purple Sunbird (*Nectarinia asiatica*), Purple-rumped Sunbird (*Nectarinia zeylonica*), Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*), House Crow (*Corvus splendens*), Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*), Spotted Dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*) and Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*).

In the Mongoose exhibit, we saw a pair of Tickell's Blue Flycatchers (*Cyornis tickelliae*), one sitting on a dried branch and displaying its bright colours while the other was restlessly picking some twigs and leaves to the build its nest. Near the fence where we stood, Aasheesh uncle showed us fresh fallen pieces of the tree bark, the wounded tree and the footprints of a Spotted Deer. He told us that deer rub their antlers against tree trunks to scrape off the velvet covering from new antlers.



**Black-crowned Night Heron**

Further ahead, we spotted about 4-5 Black-crowned Night Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) sitting still on a Bahera tree (*Terminalia belerica*). On the tree near the trench covering the Tiger enclosure, a White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) was spotted fishing for *Tilapia*. On top of a tall dry tree, we spotted 4-5 Black-rumped Flamebacks (*Dinopium benghalense*). Observing their distinctive yellow wing coverts and red crown and crest was a visual delight to us all.

In the pond adjacent to the White tiger exhibit, we spotted House Swift (*Apus affinis*), White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*), Large Egret (*Ardea alba*), Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*), Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*), Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*), Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*), Darter (*Anhinga rufa*) and Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*).



**Grey Heron**

From a distance, on a large tree in the Deer Park, we saw some large birds sitting on the branch and identified them as Black Kites (*Milvus migrans*). As we walked a little further, we saw a Common Myna feeding its chick in a burrow.



**Black Kite**

Around 30 feet away from the Hippopotamus exhibit, on the outer branches of a Tamarind tree, we spotted a Black Drongo in its nest. As we walked past the Bison Park, a Spotted Dove was seen carrying nesting material.

We also spotted Laughing Dove (*Streptopelia senegalensis*), White-browed Wagtail (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*), Tickell's Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*), Thick-billed Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum agile*), Black-headed Cuckoo-shrike (*Coracina melanoptera*), Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima*

*haemacephala*), Oriental Magpie Robin (*Copsychus saularis*), Indian Treepie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*), Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus kundoo*), Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyceros birostris*), Grey Francolin (*Francolinus pondicerianus*), Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*), Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*), Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*), Blyth's Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus dumetorum*), Shikra and Asian Pied Starling (*Sturnus contra*).



**Little Cormorant**

As the summer sun started taking its position, we all got on the 12-seater golf cart to head back to the gate. On the way back, we halted at the pond near the arched bund of Mir Alam Tank, where we spotted Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*), Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*), Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*), Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*), Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) and Painted Storks (*Mycteria leucocephala*). Just as we were all wondering why we hadn't seen any Bitterns, suddenly Humayun spotted a Yellow Bittern (*Ixobrychus sinensis*) in flight and also a Cinnamon Bittern (*Ixobrychus cinnamomeus*). We felt that by spotting a Bittern, we had the achievement of a lifetime!

During the trip Mr Waheed talked about the animal adoption programs and the Zoo education program held by the Zoo to create wildlife awareness amongst the public. Soon it was time for us to return home. We left after thanking our host Mr Waheed and the staff at the Zoo for the hospitality and warmth shared with us. Over all, it was a wonderful birding trip and we all returned highly satisfied.

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## IN THE LAP OF NATURE

### Report – WWF Amateur Naturalists Training Camp – 20-21 April 2012

Surekha Aitabathula

When I saw the article in the Hindu on Amateur Naturalists Training Camp, I just assumed it was for kids. But I called the organiser WWF, despite the assumption, and asked if there was an upper age limit (especially in the light of the fact that I would be hitting half century next year!) The congenial voice at the other end said, "No Madam, there is no upper age limit, and I know you, Madam". So thrilled was I that I immediately signed up for the two-day camp beginning April 20th.

I reached the Deer Park in Shamirpet on 20th evening and found a whole bunch of lovely kids! Ranging from Class Five to Class Twelve, they were all over the place with their backpacks and parents! Of course, once the 60-strong group was registered, it threw up other age groups too like graduates, working men and women. It was an interesting group that came together very well.

A very educative ice-breaker game resulted in introductions flying across the group, left right and centre! The game was a sort of live physical quiz. Each sub-group got a clue on a chit of paper that they picked and had to go find the answer which could have been a tree, a plant, a flower, or a butterfly. Nice way of learning about the person standing next to you and simultaneously learning the name of a tree!

We went on a nature trail into the Deer Park and were honoured with a glimpse of about ten Spotted Deer. The remarkably beautiful eyes that inspire reams of poetry, and their magnificent branching antlers, made the deer look picture perfect! It was Farida Tampal of WWF who explained how to recognise animals by their faecal matter. The peafowl's faeces had pointed ends and the deer's were rounded and pellet-like. She also pointed out geckos. The Rock Agama was the easiest to recognise, as I have seen it on the innumerable rocks I played or climbed on as a child in Banjara Hills!

Walking further ahead, we climbed the rocks that brought the Shamirpet lake into focus. We found the usual suspects like the Little Grebes, Little Cormorants, Spot-billed Ducks, Black-winged Stilts, Red-vented Bulbuls, Black Drongos and the Green Bee-eaters in and around the lake.

After the walk, we were taught jungle survival techniques. Interesting is not the word! We learnt that if you lost your way in the jungle and saw a dog, then rest assured that you are very near human settlements, because dogs always live close to man. Being his best friend and all that! When hungry, it pays not to eat red-colored fruit, as they were most likely to be poisonous. If you find a

Mosque, you will know where is North because the entrance of a Mosque always faces North. A collective gasp went up when the speaker said that once when he was lost in the desert and dying of thirst, he wrapped camel faeces in a piece of cloth, wrung it hard and drank the liquid that oozed out. Thirst quenched!

After dinner, we walked uphill and sat around a huge rock to learn navigation by stars. Unfortunately the stars played truant on that night - we couldn't see too many of them owing to cloud cover. Although I didn't learn much, I was very happy just to lie on the still-hot rock and gaze up at the stars that twinkled on our first camp night. It felt good to be alive!

Next morning the campers woke up to meet two awesome birders, Mr Shafaat Ulla and Ms Anjali Pande. Both gave invaluable tips for birding. They literally walked the campers through the deer park and taught us how to identify birds. After birding, we all sat down to make a checklist of birds seen, when a stupendous Asian Paradise-flycatcher flew in and presented itself right before us! Almost like it was saying "Hey, count me too!"

'Protected Areas of AP and Wildlife Laws and Trade' was a lecture worth every word. After the lecture, I came to the conclusion that, yes, the laws are stringent but the poacher is extremely knowledgeable, devious and heartless.

Tiger pugmark tracking was an amazing learning experience. It is possible to identify the sex, age, and physical condition like sickness or pregnancy of the tiger. We were shown the unmanned trap camera that is fitted to a tree trunk. This camera greatly aids in animal census and gives priceless pictures of animals that come into its field of view. I recalled our own birding trip to Assam. We were driving back from Kaziranga Wild Life Sanctuary. It was totally dark after sunset and at one point on the road, we were suffused in a flash of bright blue laser kind of light. It took us two seconds to realise that our jeep passed through and set off the sensor on the camera trap!

The snake show was the highlight! The Krait, the Russell's Viper, the Python and the Cobra - all were displayed to us within arm's distance. Quietly the snakes sat in a variety of containers like wooden boxes, glass jars and sacks etc. All present were totally awed by the snakes. I for one was almost respectful of them! A word about Swetha from the Friends of Snakes Society, who gave a masterful lecture-cum-demonstration on the

snakes. She knew her subject well and also handled her subjects fearlessly.

The last day of the camp was 'U Lead and V Follow'. The campers were let loose on their own to set trail and identify whatever they have learnt to identify in the last two days. The final group presentations were very well done. Skits were presented and speeches were given about the camp experience and education. We happily collected our certificates and the amusing thing was, Facebook profiles were updated on the same day saying, "Naturalist at WWF India".

And then suddenly, we realised that it was time to say goodbye, and it was at that moment of parting that affection welled up amongst the campers. Calls of "Bye", "Nice meeting you" and "Stay in Touch" rented the air.

I met some really nice people. I learnt a lot about flora and fauna. I learnt the importance of nature conservation. I walked in the Deer Park amidst greenery. I saw some deer. I saw some birds. I touched trees. I saw lizards. I saw butterflies. I felt the cool shade of a huge canopy. I sat by a lake quietly. I lay down on a rock at night and stargazed. In effect, I beat the concrete jungle hollow.

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## **CONCERNING SPARROWS AND OTHER MATTERS PASSERINE...**

### **Trip Report – Ameenpur Lake – 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012**

Text and photos: Humayun Taher



**Wagtails coming in to roost**

It started out as a trip to verify the presence of "several thousands" of roosting Yellow Wagtails. Aasheesh called me on the afternoon of 31<sup>st</sup> March and asked me if I would like to go to a place near BHEL (Ramchandrapuram) to verify a report of large numbers of roosting Wagtails at a place called Ameenpur. It was to be an afternoon trip, so as to be at the place when the wagtails, apparently, started to come in and roost in some reedbeds surrounding a small pond. Even without the allure of these numbers, a trip in the afternoon to a place close to the city and likely to provide interesting sightings was something I was not going to miss, if I could help it.

And so the next afternoon (1<sup>st</sup> April 2012) we started out: Aasheesh, Shafaat Ulla saab and self. Our informant and guide (a new member of the BSAP named Dheeraj), met us at the gates of the BHEL complex and thence guided us towards the place where he has seen these wagtails. Along the way he regaled us with reports of large numbers of other birds also using the reeds for roosting purposes. Swallows, Weavers and Munias also, apparently, were using these reedbeds and were present in decent numbers. I don't know about the others, but I do know that my mouth started watering at the tales.

Along the way, we passed a very decent little marsh abutting the road. Dheeraj told us that this place holds Comb Duck and many migrant ducks in the season. We saw a few Cotton Teals and a single female Comb Duck floating placidly, oblivious to the noise of the traffic and the large number of people around the marsh. It is heartening to see that, although there is considerable pollution and human disturbance around this place, the birds obviously find it safe enough to remain on the water. We did not make a stop here although it certainly appeared worthwhile. Maybe in the next trip a short halt can be made to advantage.

On the outskirts of Ameenpur village, I spotted a pair of House Sparrows. Mindful of the “*Citizen Sparrow*” initiative launched that very day, Asheesh suggested a halt to count the sparrows. I now saw about half-a-dozen pecking around in the dust and agreed readily that a halt might be advantageous. So we stopped and started sweeping the area. And as we looked, we realised the numbers: there were at least about 50-odd sparrows all around us. A small *proscopis* bush just ahead of us was obviously their fortress and about half the birds were congregated in and around that bush. But there were small parties that made sorties all around. A few were pecking spilled grain right near our feet. Some were perched on the electricity lines around. One hen sparrow, perched on an electricity wire, indulged in some sort of territorial display and was seen chasing away even a couple of males that ventured close. In all, there was considerable activity around this area.

Tearing our gaze away from the sparrows, we saw several other birds also. In the rice paddies around, there were some foraging Grey-headed Yellow Wagtails; Black Ibis were seen in the distance and a few Green Bee-eaters perched on the electricity lines. An Indian Roller also showed up, accompanied by a few Spotted Doves. A single White-browed Wagtail pottered about behind his Yellow cousins. In all, we could count some 25 species in this one spot alone. (For a full list of the species sighted on this trip, please see the appendix).

At length, reluctantly disentangling ourselves from this spot, we proceeded further towards the Ameenpur Lake. Dheeraj informed us that he has seen Spoonbill and large

number of waterbirds on this lake in the past. We observed that the lake was a very decent size, even though it has dried up considerably. The water-level marks on the surrounding rocks show this to be a very considerable size when it is full. The lake is apparently fed from percolating water during the rains; there are no inflows other than rainfall. The outflow goes towards a small pond to the south of this large lake. This small pond is the roosting site that we were going to investigate.

The fact that this is now summer has escaped the notice of some of our winged visitors. A flotilla of about a hundred Garganey were still with us. What was interesting to see was that this raft seemed composed almost entirely of males. If there were females in the flock, there could not have been more than about 8-10 birds at the most. A single Ruddy Shelduck was another silent rebel to nature's call. On the wading front, a small group of Little Stints probed in the mud, accompanied by a couple of Common and Wood Sandpipers. A couple of Marsh Sandpipers also joined this happy band. A few Little Ringed Plovers were running around with their brethren. On the far shore we despaired a pair of Black-tailed Godwits, resplendent in full breeding livery. A solitary Greenshank probed hopefully in the mud, accompanied by a Black-winged Stilt. There were plenty of egrets and cormorants around also and a pair of River Terns flew overhead, calling loudly.

Fully convinced that this place is deserving of a more prolonged visit than our short trip, we now proceeded towards the roosting spot. The time was close to when our guide informed us that the birds start to come in and it would not do to be caught napping. We wanted to be settled before the fly-in started so as to get a decent record of the numbers using the place. And so we headed towards the little pond that was our final destination. It proved to be a small place, less than a couple of hundred feet square, girt around on three sides by a dense growth of *typha* reeds. On the western side was the bund. This bund overlooked the paddy fields we had passed where we saw the sparrow colony. Behind us (North) was the main Ameenpur Lake (see map). A convenient rock on the shore of this pond overlooked the reeds and provided a point of vantage where we could perch and await the birds.



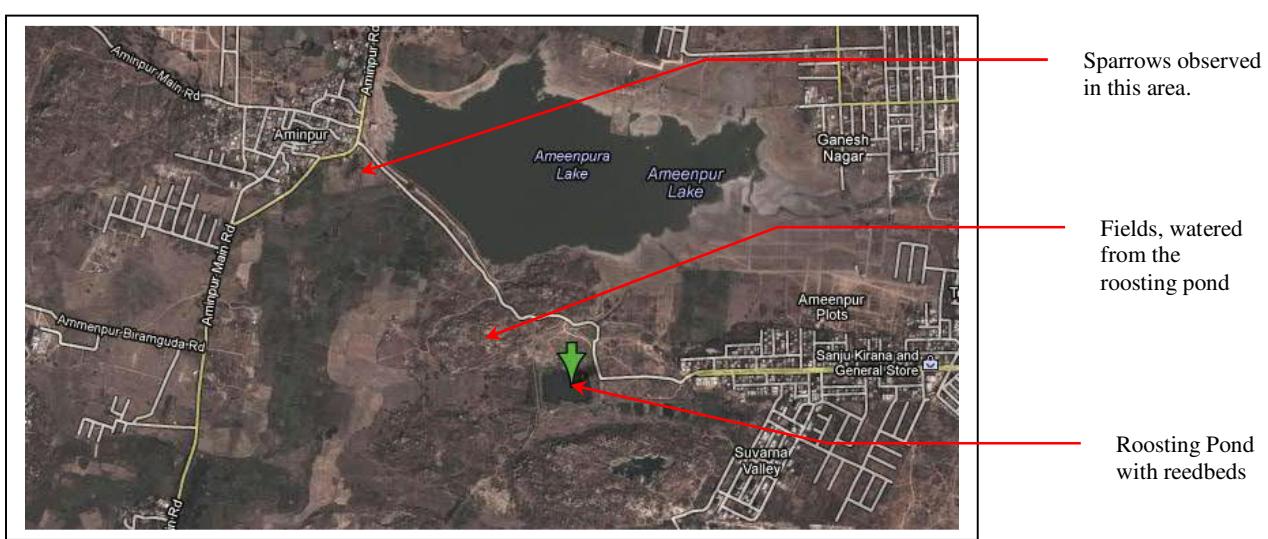
Sipping a welcome cup of tea, we could see some winged denizens of this pond already in place. A small group of Lesser Whistling-duck was accompanied by a single female Garganey! Common Moorhens, Purple Swampens and White-breasted Waterhens were patrolling the reeds accompanied by a Bronze-winged Jacana. On the rocks around the lake were perched a goodly number of Cormorants and Grey Herons. A Purple Heron flew overhead and on a towering rocky outcrop perched a single Painted Stork. A small group of Black-breasted Weavers were already settled in the reeds and these were in constant activity. Periodically a few groups of Bayas and Red Munias flew in and settled into the reeds.

A few Wagtails appeared in the sky; these were obviously the vanguard of the main population. The wagtails circled the water and settled on a field beyond a stone wall where we could not see them. As we were discussing the possibility of seeing what lay beyond that wall, we suddenly spotted vast numbers of wagtails flighting in from due west. The sun was starting to sink by this time and the sky was completely filled with the flying birds. At a conservative estimate, in the hour that we sat there, three to four thousand wagtails flew into the reeds for roosting. The behaviour of the birds was very interesting. Not a single bird settled directly into the reeds. They flew over the lake, settling into the field beyond the wall. From

here they again took off (usually when a fresh flock came overhead), mingled with the flying birds and swept over their roosting reeds. A few birds peeled away from the flock and dropped into the reeds and were immediately hidden from view. The remaining birds again settled in the field, took off again and the entire exercise was repeated. At no point of time did I notice a mass dive into the reeds. Always it was a few birds that dropped at each fly-past. It was almost as though the birds did not want to give predators any indication that the flock was settling for the night.

It was, of course, far too dark to properly identify the incoming birds; but from what we could see, it seemed as though all these were variants of the Yellow Wagtails. I could only tell a few (which were obviously Blue-headed Yellow Wagtails), but it seems probable that all these are the same species. However, this statement is open to correction by further observations.

Well satisfied with the experience, and as the shades of darkness were now closing in, we turned towards the vehicle, disturbing a couple of early Nightjars that started their chuckling call from close by. A single bird flew close by, as we climbed into the vehicle and started back to the city; with a tally of 75 species in our bag. Good going by any standards, I would say.



Map of the lake and surrounding areas

#### Appendix – List of all species sighted

1) Baya Weaver	9) House Crow	17) Spot-billed Duck
2) Green Bee-eater	10) Greater Coucal	18) Intermediate Egret
3) Yellow Bittern	11) Darter	19) Little Egret
4) Red-vented Bulbul	12) Laughing Dove	20) Cattle Egret
5) Pied Bushchat	13) Spotted Dove	21) Garganey
6) Common Coot	14) Black Drongo	22) Black-tailed Godwit
7) Large Cormorant	15) Ruddy Shelduck	23) Little Grebe
8) Little Cormorant	16) Comb Duck	24) Greenshank

25) Marsh Harrier	42) Red Avadavat (Munia)	60) Little Stint
26) Grey Heron	43) Common Myna	61) Asian Openbill
27) Black-crowned Night Heron	44) Asian Pied Starling	62) Painted Stork
28) Indian Pond Heron	45) Common Indian Nightjar	63) Barn Swallow
29) Purple Heron	46) Rose-ringed Parakeet	64) House Swift
30) Black Ibis	47) Grey Francolin	65) Common Tailorbird
31) White Ibis	48) Indian Peafowl	66) Indian River Tern
32) Bronze-winged Jacana	49) Blue Rock Pigeon	67) Cotton Pygmy-goose
33) Pied Kingfisher	50) Paddyfield Pipit	68) Lesser Whistling-duck
34) White-breasted Kingfisher	51) Little Ringed Plover	69) Blue Rock Thrush
35) Black-shouldered Kite	52) Indian Robin	70) White-browed Wagtail
36) Black Kite	53) Indian Roller	71) Yellow Wagtail
37) Asian Koel	54) Rosy Starling	72) Ashy Prinia
38) Red-wattled Lapwing	55) Common Sandpiper	73) Great Indian Reed Warbler
39) Common Moorhen	56) Marsh Sandpiper	74) White-breasted Waterhen
40) Purple Swamphen	57) Wood Sandpiper	75) Black-breasted Weaver
41) Scaly-breasted Munia	58) House Sparrow	
	59) Black-winged Stilt	

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### **Report – Indoor Meeting – 26<sup>th</sup> April 2012**

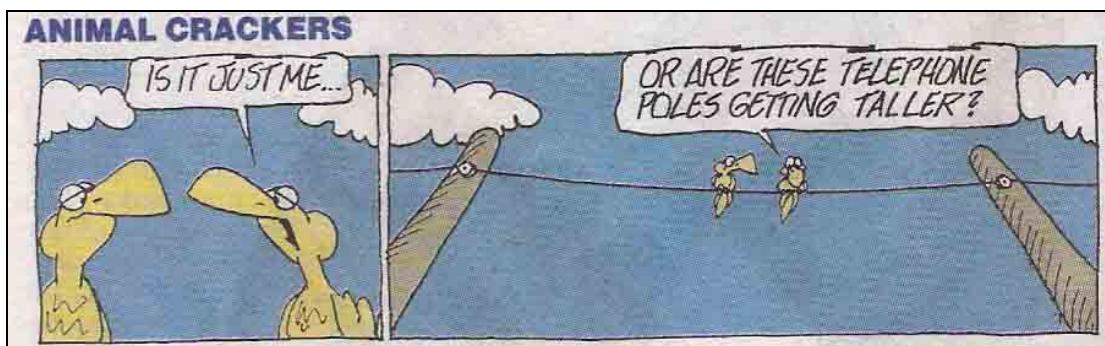
Asif Husain

The Indoor Meet at the new premises of Goethe-Zentrum was unbelievable. More than 30 people turned up to watch the documentary “The Splendour of Australian Birds”. Two episodes were screened. The first episode was ‘Birds of the Forest’ which had some fascinating forest birds including the amazing Satin Bower-bird, which collected amazing bright material to build its nest and attract its mate. The famous Australian bird, Cassowary, was shown to be a dangerous bird whose kick can cause an injury even to a human being. It is also a great Seed Disperser on the forest floor, helping the Ecosystem. The next episode was a fantastic journey to Lake Iyre in Australia, which is the greatest salt lake bed in the world. It is very well-placed geographically and,

when there are rains, the whole belt turns into an amazing ecosystem bursting with life. The Australian Pelican was filmed superbly and it still remains a mystery how these birds recognize, from thousands of kilometers away, that there is going to be rain and that this place will be suitable for breeding. The young fledglings of the Australian Pelican were beautifully photographed feeding from the largest bill in the avian world. These Pelicans breed in the lake and in summer, when the water is scarce, they take the risk and those young pelicans which are able to take to air, survive and the others are left behind. Apart from the Australian Pelicans, other birds like the beautiful Red-necked Avocets and Banded Stilts were also captured beautifully in this documentary.

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### **Bird Humour**



(From Times of India, 03-03-2010)

## **Bird of the Month**

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

### **River Tern (*Sterna aurantia*)**



**River Tern flock**  
(Himayatsagar, 11-09-2010)

Order: Charadriiformes  
Family: Sternidae  
Genus: *Sterna*  
Species: *S. aurantia*  
Size: 38 – 46 cm

**Description:** Possibly the most easily seen and recognized bird in the Tern family, the River Tern (or Indian River Tern) is a resident breeder in most parts of its range. It is a medium-sized bird with dark grey upperparts and white underparts. It has long, pointed wings, and a forked tail with long streamers. It has red legs and a yellow bill. In breeding season, its head has a black cap, which turns greyish-white in the non-breeding season; it also has a dark mask through the eyes, and the tip of the bill turns dusky.

The sexes are similar; however, the juvenile bird has grey upperparts marked with brown, white underparts, and grey on the sides of the breast. The bill is yellowish, and has a dark tip.

**Behaviour:** A resident breeder, it is usually seen near lakes or along inland river-banks, in numbers that can

vary from 1-2 right up to flocks of several score. Its range extends from Iran eastwards to the Indian subcontinent and further to Myanmar and Thailand, where it is less common. Unlike other *Sterna* terns, the River Tern sticks almost exclusively to fresh-water bodies, and generally avoids even tidal creeks. Like them though, it feeds by plunge-diving, looking for fish, crustaceans, tadpoles and aquatic insects. Though its status on the IUCN 'Red List' is one of 'Least Concern', it does face a big threat in the form of pollution of its habitat.

The call of the River Tern can be heard [here](#). 

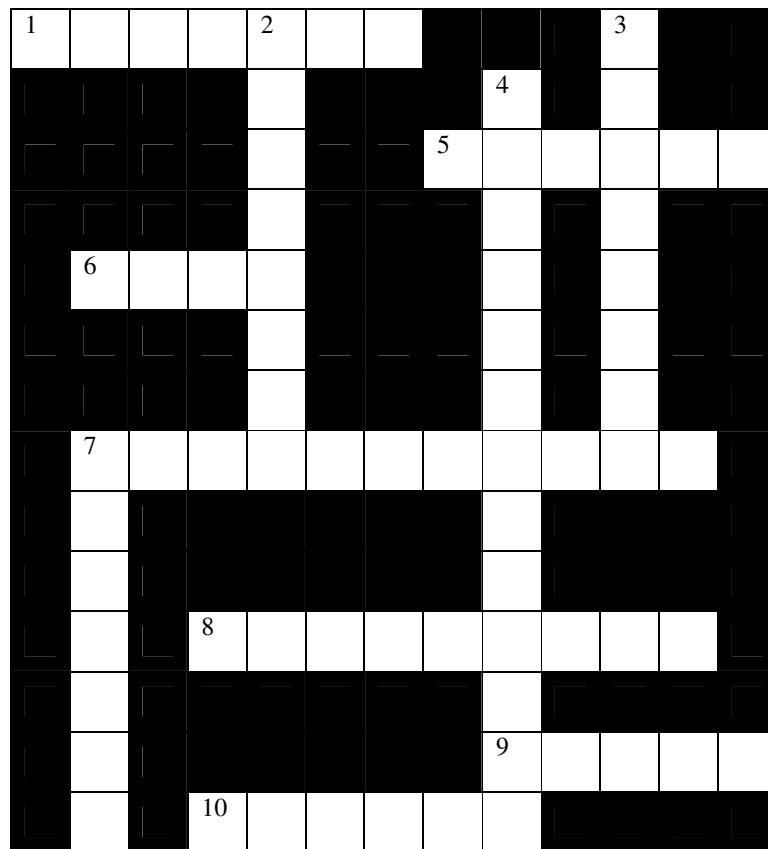
**Nesting:** The River Tern breeds from March to May. It builds its colonies in somewhat inaccessible spots like sandbanks amid rivers. The nest is a scrape in the ground, sometimes on bare rock or sand. A typical clutch is 3 eggs, which are greenish-grey to buff, with brownish blotches and streaks.

**Local name:** It is known as 'nadi kurri' in Sanskrit, 'ramadasu' in Telugu, 'kulathu aala' in Tamil and 'puzha aala' in Malayalam.

## **BIRDING CROSSWORD #5**

Umesh Mani

The answers to the clues given below are bird names or other birding-related terms. Let's see how many you can find!  
(*Solutions in next month's Pitta*)



### **ACROSS**

- 1 He follows the path or route (7)
- 5 To rearrange, uncoat this bird (6)
- 6 Under the train (4)
- 7 This bird rides the waves on fast naval ships (11)
- 8 Reptile or avian? Or both? (5-4)
- 9 Two under par in golf (5)
- 10 This bird runs swiftly around 8-Across also (6)

### **DOWN**

- 2 Shocking! No tea? (8)
- 3 This chap uses regional variations while speaking (8)
- 4 This chatterbox is seen everywhere (6, 8)
- 7 Before her achievement, get a flight aid (7)

Solutions to Crossword #4 (Pitta, April 2012)

**ACROSS:** 1 – SWALLOW, 6 – CURLEW, 9 – HONEYGUIDE, 11 – BRAHMINY KITE

**DOWN:** 2 - LARK, 3 - WHIMBREL, 4 - DUNLIN, 5 - NUTHATCH, 7 - QUACKING, 8 - SPARROW, 10 – KNOT

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**For Private Circulation Only**

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**For information, write to:** Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** [http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap\\_online](http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online). **Website:** [www.bsap.in](http://www.bsap.in). **Society membership** (in Rs.): Admission: 100; Annual: 400 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh  
New Series Volume 9 Number 6 June 2012

### **FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 17<sup>th</sup> June 2012, 6.30AM: Kasu Brahmananda Reddy Park (KBR), Jubilee Hills.**

Spread out over 400 acres, this park was originally the Chiran Palace grounds. Plenty of Partridges and Peafowl can be spotted - a recent Peafowl Census at KBR gave a good tally of 136 Peafowl. The lake in the park might throw up some waders and ducks. One can expect to see some scrubland birds as well.

This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

### **INDOOR MEETING: THE SPLENDOUR OF AUSTRALIAN BIRDS, Part-3**

**Thursday, 28<sup>th</sup> June 2012, 6.00PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034.** (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443)

From the archives of esteemed wildlife filmmaker, Bettina Dalton and the Absolutely Wild Visuals catalogue comes the definitive collection of Australian birdlife, shot on various locations around the country and featuring some never-before-seen footage of common, exotic, endangered and, even extinct species of Australian birds. In addition, this collection includes footage from the renowned Densey Clyne collection, as well as a beautiful montage of bird footage set to music, created especially for this superb collection.

### **PARK BY THE LAKE**

#### **Trip Report – Sanjeervaiah Park – 13<sup>th</sup> May 2012**

Text: Surekha Aitabathula, Photos: Jahangir Shaik



**Spot-billed Duck** (Photo: Jahangir Shaik)

How many of you have seen a Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*) with six legs? Probably none. Hold your breath...Some of us who went birding to Sanjeervaiah Park on the second Sunday of this month did! It was a keen birder, B. D. Chaudhari who sighted it and

immediately all binocs went up and framed the bird that had actually taken two of its chicks totally under its wing, thereby hiding their little upper bodies from view. All we could see was the Stilt and six red legs - so there you are!

These are the heart-warming visions that you get to see if you go birding at the crack of dawn. The Stilt's slender, fragile and never-ending red legs are its signature identification - it looks as though it is walking on stilts and hence the name. Watching it walk in shallow water is akin to relearning the definition of grace and daintiness. The Stilt's legs, like the Flamingo's are longer in proportion to its body.



**Black-winged Stilt** (Photo: Jahangir Shaik)

Earlier, as we entered the park and waited for the group to gather, we saw Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*) with their resplendent green speculum. The Purple Swamphen's (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) bright color and the scarlet red bill and frontal shield make it very attractive. It is said to be a good swimmer, especially for a bird without webbed feet.



**Purple Swamphen** (Photo: Jahangir Shaik)

We also saw Common Coots (*Fulica atra*) with their prominent, featherless white frontal shields, Little Grebes (*Tachybaptos ruficollis*), White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*) and Grey Herons (*Ardea*

*cinerea*) - large birds that stand over three feet with wingspans measuring an awesome five feet! We also spotted its cousin, the Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*) and Common Moorhens (*Gallinula chloropus*). I read in BBC Nature that the Common Moorhens are incredibly resourceful. Scientists recorded an incident where during heavy rain, a bird incubating eggs was seen to cover itself with a sheet of polythene like a cape and then remove it once the rain stopped!

While we were observing these avian denizens in the lake, Mr MJ Akbar, OSD, Buddha Poornima Project, HMDA, joined us and gave us a quick tour of the park, followed by an awesome breakfast! We are thankful to him for enthusiastically showing us the Rock Garden, which I thought was an excellent learning experience. The Rock Garden houses a large variety of cactus plants. The cacti were very intelligently spread out within the enclosure and the literature mounted on a circular wall in the centre was very conducive for reading and learning on the spot. Our group predictably burst into laughter when someone pointed out cactus plants that are actually called 'Mother-in-law's tongue' and 'Mother-in-law's chair'!



(Photo: G Siva Saradhi)

We spotted a good number of birds like the Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus kundoo*), Asian Pied Starling (*Sturnus contra*) White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*), Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), Purple-rumped Sunbird (*Nectarinia zeylonica*), Common Hawk Cuckoo (*Heirococcyx varius*), Grey Hornbill (*Ocyceros birostris*), Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*), Asian Koel (*Eudynamys scolopacea*), Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*), Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*), Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*), Bronze-winged Jacana (*Metopidius indicus*), White-browed Wagtail (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*), Tickell's Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*), Zitting Cisticola (*Cisticola juncidis*) and Lesser Whistling-duck (*Dendrocygna javanica*).



**Black Drongo** (Photo: Jahangir Shaik)

When I go birding these days, I notice that I keenly look out for birds which I haven't seen before. That does not mean however, that I don't enjoy sighting our omnipresent avian friends like the Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*), Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*), Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*), Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*), Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*), etc.

Whether seen before or not, each and every bird sighting makes an avid birder happy! By now we are all used to seeing Black Kites around garbage dumps in the city, but despite their constant presence, my eyes still go up to watch them glide, sometimes even making me crane my neck out of the car window! The Black Kites have become generals of garbage dumps. Sad but true. Left with no choice, Black Kites have learnt to forage at alternate food sources due to total non-availability of carrion on which they originally used to feed.



**Purple Heron** (Photo: Jahangir Shaik)

Rajeev Mathew, a knowledgeable birder, gave us some pointers on how to recognise raptors by their wing patterns while in flight. Being a complete raptorophile, I

was happy to learn the differing wing patterns of Eagles, Hawks and Vultures that makes identification easier.

The doyen of bird watching, late Salim Ali, best sums up the sheer physics and aerodynamics of bird flight in his 'Book of Indian Birds'. He says "The wing actions of a bird in flight are actually less simple than the up-and-down flapping they appear to be. They involve a number of complex principles of aerodynamics which have been more intensively studied and are better understood since the invention and development of the aeroplane and the glider. Modern aircraft design owes a great debt to the careful analyses of the principles involved in the flight of the birds. The improvements continually being made in flying machines keep pace with our knowledge of the mechanics of bird flight".

A word about the Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*). The scientific name in Latin means 'large-throated red head'. All of us birders definitely make a pit stop at the 'Barbet area' in the park. This bird with striking color patches chisels a neat roosting hole in trees. During one of our earlier trips some of us were lucky enough to watch a Barbet clean the hole and throw out the garbage! It was awesome, believe me! A first-time birder, techie and photography enthusiast, Jahangir Shaik captured very dramatic pictures of the Coppersmith Barbet on this trip.



**Coppersmith Barbet** (Photo: Jahangir Shaik)

The Barbet's call is a loud and metallic *tuk* or *tunk* reminiscent of a copper sheet being beaten, giving the bird its name. Repeated monotonously for long periods, starting with a subdued *tuk* and building up to an even volume and tempo, the latter varying from 108 to 121 per minute (though it can go as high as 204 notes per minute). In winter they are silent and do not call.

Amazingly, the beak remains shut during each call, a patch of bare skin on both sides of the throat inflates and collapses with each *tuk*, like a rubber bulb, and the head is bobbed. When I read this bit of information about the Barbet's call, I was so intrigued that I fell in love with bird watching all over again.

## **BIRDS DOWN UNDER** **Report – Indoor Meeting – 24<sup>th</sup> May 2012**

Text: Surekha Aitabathula;

Photos provided by Sasya Dev from the DVD 'The Splendour of Australian Birds' by Reel DVD



**Spotted Parrot**

"Tausend dank an Goethe Zentrum fur den Umzug nach Banjara Hills" - translates to "Million thanks to the German Centre for moving to Banjara Hills." German Centre is now a virtual stone's throw from my place. No traffic snarls en route now when I go to watch BSAP's indoor events. YAY!!!

This month we watched the continuation of the film 'Birds of Australia'. The film takes you on a grand tour of the splendid countryside of Australia, its birdlife, its islands and its lakes. It tracked some really fantastic birds, initially profiling several species of parrots. I thought the parrots' wardrobe contained some of the most brilliant colour combinations and designs. Having kept the best of the hues for themselves, they looked unapologetically flamboyant!



The Orange-bellied Parrot ( *Neophema chrysogaster* ) is one of the two species of parrots which migrate. It has grass-green upperparts, yellow underparts, orange belly patch, and blue frontal patch and outer wing feathers. With the *pot pourri* of colours, the bird looked ready to join a carnival. It breeds in Tasmania and winters in the coastal grasslands of Southern Mainland Australia. This beautiful bird is listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List and efforts are being made in the form of captive breeding programme.



The Swift Parrot and Princess Parrot are named after Princess Alexandra of Denmark, who later married Prince of Wales Edward VII and eventually became Queen of England.



The Golden-shouldered Parrot (*Psephotus chrysoterygius*) is another rare bird found in Southern Cape York peninsula in Queensland, Australia and is considered to be a super species along with the Hooded Parrot and the apparently extinct Paradise Parrot. Its wardrobe is a mix of powder blue, yellow, black, pink and grey-brown! An important habitat requirement for this parrot is the existence of terrestrial termite mounds which the bird uses for nesting. For this reason it is also called the Antbed Parrot.



**Gouldian Finch**

The Gouldian Finch (*Erythrura gouldiae*), a.k.a. Gould Finch or Rainbow Finch, is a colourful passerine endemic to Australia. It was first described by the British Ornithological artist John Gould. Both sexes display an appliquéd work of brilliant and contrasting colours. The only difference is that the male's chest is purple and female's is light mauve. Sadly there is strong evidence of continuing decline of its numbers. These birds eat sorghum and nest in tree holes, generally within a kilometre from water. They are essentially nomadic and stay wherever there is plenty food and water. Very young Gouldian finches have phosphorent beads on the sides of their beaks and a wide gape to help the parent see them in

the dark. The attractive colours make them an easy target for predators.

The Helmeted Honeyeater (*Lichenostomus melanops cassidix*) is the largest and the most brightly coloured subspecies of the Yellow-tufted Honeyeater. It has a distinctive black mask in the middle of its yellow throat, pointed yellow ear-tufts, the fixed 'helmet' of golden plush feathers on the forehead and a dull golden crown and the nape demarcated from the dark olive brown back and wings. Underparts are olive yellow. Wild population is now restricted to a five kilometre length of remnant bushlands along two streams in the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve in Yellingbo, about 50 kms east of Central Melbourne. The birds inhabit riparian vegetation along riverbanks and are sedentary, territorial and aggressive.



**Red Goshawk** (Photo taken from [birdwatch.co.uk](http://birdwatch.co.uk))

The Red Goshawk (*Erythrociorchis radiatus*) is a large and powerful rufous-brown hawk with a large wingspan of 100 to 135 cms. The female is heavier, tipping the scales at 1.1 kilograms. It is boldly mottled and streaked with rufous scalloping on the back and upper wings and its rufous underparts are the brightest. It lacks streaking on the thighs and has massive yellowish legs and feet and boldly barred underwings. It is sparsely dispersed across approximately 15 per cent of coastal and sub-coastal Australia. It breeds in wooded areas within one kilometer of permanent water. The nest is a large structure made of dead sticks with a saucer-shaped hollow and the top thickly lined with finer twigs and green eucalyptus leaves. 95 per cent of its diet consists of birds.



**Australian Kestrel**

Australian Kestrel (*Falco cenchroides*) is Australia's smallest falcon and one of the most frequently sighted raptors. They have specially adapted eyes which enable them to see Ultra-violet light. The Kestrel is able to locate the trails of voles visually. These small rodents leave scent trails of urine and faeces that reflect UV light, thus making them visible to the Kestrels. The high metabolic rate of this bird quickly renews its damaged cells that have been exposed to UV light.



**Barn Owl**

The Budgerigar (*Melopsittacus undulatus*), nicknamed Budgie, is a small long-tailed seed-eating parrot. It has a light green abdomen and rump, while the mantles display

pitch black markings edged in clear yellow. The forehead is yellow in adults, but with black stripes down to the centre in young individuals. They display small purple cheek patches with a series of black spots across each side of their throats called throat spots. The tail is cobalt and outside tail feathers display central yellow patches. Bills are olive grey and legs are bluish grey with zygodactyl toes.

The pristine and verdant Lord Howe Island was another visual treat. This island is a volcanic remnant in the Tasman Sea between Australia and New Zealand. Spread across 14.55 square kilometres, the natural attractions of this island include a rich diversity of landscapes; virtually untouched forests with many of its plants and animals seen nowhere else in the world; a variety of upper mantle and oceanic basalts; and the world's southernmost barrier coral reef and nesting birds. This has since been declared a World Heritage Site of global natural significance by UNESCO.



**Wedge-tailed Eagle**

Thus ended the beautiful film on the birds of Australia. The film absolutely beckons you to go down under.

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## **Report – Wildlife Census, Mahavir Harina Vanasthali National Park – 20<sup>th</sup> May 2012**

Dr G Samuel Sukumar



**Black Buck (Male)** (Left, photo by Dr G Samuel Sukumar) & **Doe (Female)** (Right, photo by Vijay Menon)

The Forest Department had invited BSAP to conduct a wildlife survey at Mahavir Harina Vanasthali National Park on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May. As our members are aware, BSAP had earlier carried out the Peafowl Census at KBR Park, and the Peafowl and Spotted Deer Survey at Mrugavani National Park, Chilkur. This was the third census work BSAP undertook this year. As the Park covers a huge area of 3605 acres, the census was carried out by 17 participants from BSAP, in addition to volunteers from other NGOs like World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the Friends of Snakes Society.



**Mr Shankaran and Mr Krishnamurthy of the Forest Dept**

(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)



**A section of the participants**

(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

The 75 volunteers, who were to take stock of the herbivore population of Black Buck, Spotted Deer and other wildlife, were split into 25 groups to accomplish this task. The enthusiastic groups were given a tabulation sheet and a pre-census briefing by Mr Shankaran, Conservator of Forests, and Mr Krishnamurthy, Curator of the Park. Mr Shankaran explained that this National Park was a safe haven for herbivores as carnivores were absent. He explained that the increasing population of herbivores was used as prey base in tiger reserves, thus creating a fair chance for the survival of tigers in these reserves.



**Spotted Deer (Male)** (Photo: Vijay Menon)

The park is divided into sections 1 and 2 and the main park area. The teams were dropped at various starting points in the Park buses and guided by forest guards. The scorching summer heat did not deter the young school children from participating - in fact, they enjoyed themselves watching the black buck and spotted deer freely roaming in their habitat. Intrigued by a red brick-like object hanging from a rod near a watering hole and fodder point, Shravya and Ankita of Class Ten and Eleven, respectively, went to examine it and learnt that it was a brick of salt and minerals, for herbivores to supplement their salt and vitamin deficiency by licking the brick when they came for fodder or water.



**Spotted Deer Hind (Female)** (Photo: Vijay Menon)

At about 11.00AM, all the teams were brought back to the meeting area by Mr Amjad Ali, Forest Range Officer and Mr Jagadeesh Chandra, Forest Section Officer. Mr Amjad Ali, we were informed, was an honest and hard working officer, who tirelessly worked for the conservation and development of this National Park. The hungry

participants were offered a sumptuous breakfast of *idli*, *vada*, *sambar*, *upma*, sandwiches and hot tea and coffee alongwith plenty of bottles of refreshingly cold mineral water.

Each group then gave an account of what they saw and the details were noted down by Mr Shankaran. They collated the results category-wise and finally declared the total count, taking into account the 27 km line with an average sighting distance of 30 m on both sides and a  $20\% \pm 10\%$  sampling area. The number of Black Buck were 515, Spotted Deer were 750 - 800 and Peafowl 375 - 400. Some teams also saw a white-coloured black buck.



**Leucistic Black Buck** (Photo: Vijay Menon)



**Indian Pond Heron**  
(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Birders see birds everywhere. A flap of a wing in the bush above or below, and even before a bird flies out, out come possible names, and finally the bird is identified. The Blue-faced Malkoha (*Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*), Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyceros birostris*), Grey Francolin (*Francolinus pondicerianus*), Green Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*), Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*), White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*), Laughing Dove (*Streptopelia senegalensis*), Black Eagle (*Ictinaetus malayensis*), Purple-rumped Sunbird (*Nectarinia zeylonica*), Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*), Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*), Large-billed Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*) and the much-loved Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) were some of the common bird species.



Blue-faced Malkoha (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

The park also has a well-maintained butterfly park with quite a large variety of butterflies, and foliage that supports them. Every one left with a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment and eagerly looked forward to another census in the near future.



Asian Koel Male (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)



Indian Treepie (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

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### **Some observations on the probable local movements of Painted Francolin (*Francolinus pictus*)**

Anand Kalinadhabhatla & Humayun Taher

The Painted Francolin (*Francolinus pictus*), previously called the Painted Partridge is a member of the family of ground birds (partridges, quail, peafowl and pheasants). It is a secretive bird and, though quite brightly coloured when actually seen, it has a remarkable tendency to disappear unobtrusively into the background. It is most visible during the breeding season, when the cock birds indulge in loud calling, in the hope of attracting a mate.

We had heard a large number of these birds calling in Appanapally during a visit we made to this place in September 2011. Subsequently, the bird started getting reported from places like the HCU, National Police Academy and ICRISAT Center. This prompted us to see if there is any local movement of the birds which accounts for their not being visible outside the breeding season.

Foremost reference was from a note in the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society (JBNHS)<sup>1</sup> by Humayun

Abdulali. Although the note deals with the birds “around Bombay”, the gist of the note is that there is some ground to suggest that the birds “breed in fairly heavy scrub and then wander off to the grasslands”. The correspondent mentions, “I estimate the distance... is some 24 miles...” The article concludes with “During the monsoon one hears them calling all round, and one would venture a statement that there were a couple dozen birds in the neighbourhood. After the crops have been harvested and the grass cut down, they disappear and possibly collect in favourable places.”

This sounded intriguing, so we went through all available (to us) sight, call and photographic records of Painted Francolin (for the last 3 or 4 years). Most if not all, of these records are from Andhra Pradesh (AP), Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh (MP), Gujarat and Rajasthan. Table 1 below gives the records of this bird calling during a particular month.

We also considered a photograph to be a call record, if the bird appeared to be calling in the picture. Interestingly most pictures of this bird, on various forums, are taken when it is calling. This is a clear indication that the bird is seen and photographed mostly when it is calling.

**Table 1**

Month	Records
April	1
May	1
June	1
July	8
Aug	8
Sep	14
Oct	3

The birds are generally sighted during their breeding season (southwest monsoon). This is because during this period they call continuously, unwillingly announcing

their presence to birdwatchers, predators and poachers. The call is loud and distinct and, once heard, cannot be mistaken. The calling birds choose a clear perch such as a boulder, tree stump or a low branch of a tree to call from, making them clearly visible when calling.

The above small sample of records with their location and time of sighting does not seem to indicate any local migration. Of course, this can only be proved upon observation for several months, keeping a constant eye open for the birds, which is very difficult given that this bird simply vanishes (falls silent and lurks in the bushes and is not seen or recorded) after the southwest monsoon recedes and the breeding season ends. To a normally wary nature, it adds a quite phenomenal eyesight and power of hearing. It is not easy to creep up on one of these birds. We have tried it dozens of times, and almost always, the bird saw us long before we saw it.

Table 2 gives details of a few recent records from AP:

**Table 2**

Date	Place	Recorded by
27-Jun-10	Ananthagiri	Aasheesh, BSAP trip (call)
31-Jul-10	ICRISAT	Tom Hash (seen, may be when it is calling?)
30-Jul-11	Appanapally	Anand, Mahipal (call, seen)
Early August 2011	Srikakulam	Humayun (call )
14-Aug-11	Appanapally	Anand, Sathya (call, seen)
Early Sep 2011	HCU Peacock Lake	Anand (call, two days in a row)
10-Sep-11	Appanapally	Anand, Humayun (call, seen)
18-Sep-11	National Police Academy	BSAP trip (call)
Late Sep 2011	HCU Nursery	Anand (accidentally seen, flushed when approached close, not calling)

From AP records (calling or not calling) the bird was noticed from June to September. However, we are not sure if they migrate to other places or simply are not noticed from October to May. More data from other members will be of great interest.

#### References:

- 1) Abdulali H (1942): Local Movements of the Painted Partridge (*Francolinus pictus* Jard. & Selby) around Bombay; JBNHS Vol. 43, No.4, pp 658; Bombay
- 2) Ogden, F C D (1943): Local Movements of the Painted Partridge *Francolinus pictus* around Bombay; JBNHS Vol. 44, No.2, pp 299; Bombay

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#### Bird Humour



(From Times of India, 22-11-2010)

## **Bird of the Month**

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

### Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*)



**Rose-ringed Parakeet**  
(Inkriyal, 31-10-2010)

Order: Psittaciformes  
Family: Psittaculidae  
Genus: *Psittacula*  
Species: *P. krameri*  
Size: 40 cm

**Description:** The commonest of the parakeets, the Rose-ringed Parakeet is overall a bright green in colour, and gets its name from a pink ring around its neck (in the male birds). It also has a bright-red bill and a black 'beard' going down from its bill to its throat and back around (but not completely around) the neck. The female and immature birds either do not have any neck-rings, or display shadowy pale-to-dark grey neck-rings. It is a resident breeder in most parts of its wide distribution, which ranges across Africa and Asia (east up to around Myanmar). There are also well-established feral / naturalized populations in some European cities, the Middle East, Iran, Lebanon, Israel, South Africa, and parts of Australia and the United States.

**Behaviour:** It is a gregarious species. As one of the few parrot species that has adapted successfully to living in 'disturbed habitats', it is seen quite often in urban habitat. It is also quite common in forests, near water-bodies, fields, etc. In fact, it is seen as a major agricultural pest in many areas. In the wild, Rose-ringed Parakeets feed on buds, fruits, vegetables, nuts, berries and seeds. Wild

flocks can sometimes fly several miles across fields, causing widespread damage to farmlands and orchards.

The Rose-ringed Parakeet has a noisy squawking call, but its ability to mimic noises has made it a very popular choice as a domestic pet. Both males and females can mimic human speech (though it may take time and exposure to several repetitions). Many people hand-raise chicks for this purpose and hence, the birds can be quite tame - even eating from the hand - and very receptive to learning. They may also show emotions similar to humans and can become quite attached to families. Though its status on the IUCN 'Red List' is one of 'Least Concern', the Rose-ringed Parakeet faces a serious threat from the pet trade.

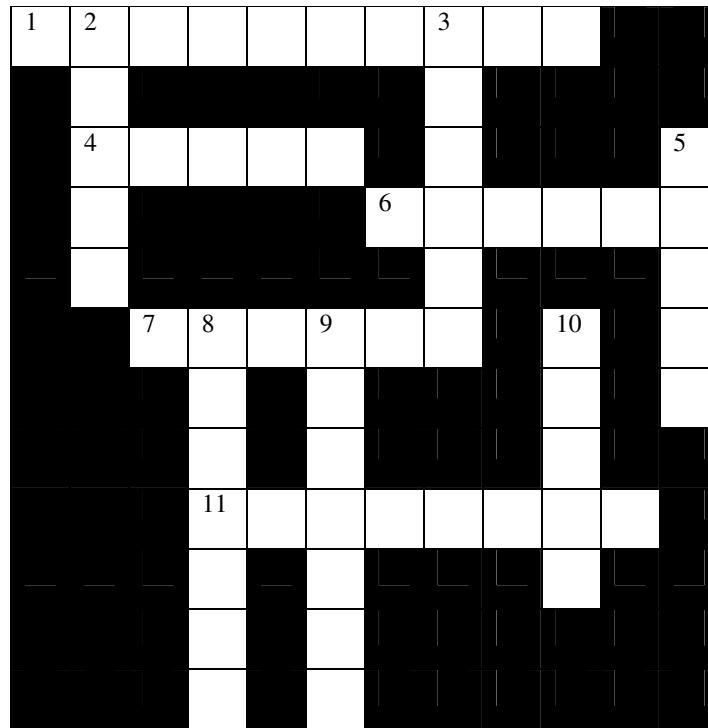
**Nesting:** The Rose-ringed Parakeet breeds between February and April, with some local variations. They commonly build their nests in tree hollows, either natural or excavated by the birds themselves. They may also choose holes in rock surfaces or building walls, either ruined or in use, and sometimes even in noisy areas. A typical clutch is 4-6 eggs, which are pure white, and roundish-oval in shape.

**Local name:** It is known as 'tota' or 'lybar tota' in Hindi, 'rama chiluka' in Telugu and 'popat' in Gujarati and Marathi.

## **BIRDING CROSSWORD #6**

Umesh Mani

The answers to the clues given below are bird names or other birding-related terms. Let's see how many you can find!  
(*Solutions in next month's Pitta*)



### **ACROSS**

1	-	To cut or clip the H2O (10)
4	-	Topless prize for a shorebird (5)
6	-	Nuts! Live inside a clock? (6)
7	-	Grab at a full complement of eggs (6)
11	-	Threw three vowels together for this bird with a 'white rear' (8)

### **DOWN**

2	-	Sells these birds of prey? (5)
3	-	This songbird has a children's disease (6)
5	-	'Yes'-man or wooden toy boy (5)
8	-	Around the track with just one flight aid? This bird did it! (7)
9	-	Peer at the tie showing this bird (7)
10	-	This monkey loses direction and gets a throat stripe (5)

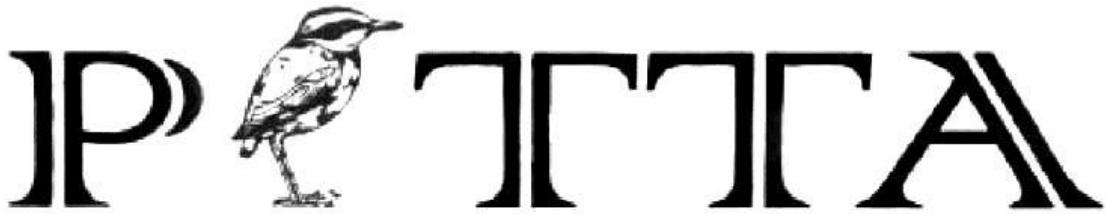
Solutions to Crossword #5 (Pitta, May 2012)

**ACROSS:** 1 – COURSER, 5 – TOUCAN, 6 – RAIL, 7 – FRIGATEBIRD, 8 – SNAKE-BIRD, 9 – EAGLE, 10 – DARTER  
**DOWN:** 2 - STARLING, 3 - ACCENTOR, 4 – COMMON BABBLED, 7 - FEATHER

**For Private Circulation Only**

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Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh  
New Series Volume 9 Number 7 July 2012

### **FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2012, 6.00AM: Mrugavani National Park (Chilkur Deer Park).**

Chilkur is located around 25km from the city and is home to woodland birds. The Blue-faced Malkoha is always seen here. Keep a lookout for the harbingers of monsoon – the Pied Crested Cuckoo.

This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

### **INDOOR MEETING: PEAK OIL AND WILD LIFE**

**Thursday, 19<sup>th</sup> July 2012, 6.00PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034.** (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443)

Wild life faces immense threat and danger and the main reason is habitat loss due to human interference. This has become acute in the last 200 years and is a by-product of an industrial society. Most attempts at conservation have been largely unsuccessful, with a few notable exceptions, because they are being carried out without questioning the industrial society or its attitude towards nature.

Peak Oil means that the production of petroleum products have reached a peak and will only fall in future. This talk by T. Vijayendra and Shashank gives insights into how a society like ours can save the wildlife.

### **Trip Report – KBR National Park – 17<sup>th</sup> June 2012**

Dr Nupur



**Indian Peafowl (male)** (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

The Peafowl Census at KBR Park on 18<sup>th</sup> March along with GHAC and WWF had all of us wanting to visit the

place again for a more detailed and leisurely bird watching.

Finally the day came - a nice, cool morning with mild sun. We gathered outside the park and as we watched a huge flock of Rock Pigeons (*Columba livia*) feeding, our team got bigger. At around 06:20 we set off with an officer and a forest guard from the Forest Department guiding us through the park. The first sighting was obviously that of a male Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*), welcoming us with its majestic presence!

Kasu Brahmananda Reddy Park (KBR Park) at the heart of the city is a national park and sanctuary for our national bird and covers an area of 390 acres approximately and boasts of 600 species of floral diversity. This whole area is a shelter for over 130 species of birds and a considerable variety of butterflies and reptiles. We can even find animals like civet, jungle cat, mongoose, hare and porcupine which have a safe nesting zone here.



Indian Peafowl (male) (Photo: Vijay Menon)

While walking along the 'Morning Walkers' Track' we could see birds like the Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*), Common Iora (*Aegithina tiphia*) and Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*). By the time all of us reached at a Y-point and identified a Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*) sitting on top of a tree far away, one of the group members had drawn our attention towards a nice musical note - the call of the Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*). This call took us on a narrow trail to spot the small bird.

As we proceeded within the protected zones, the team split into smaller groups, and as a result the total count of bird species went above 30! We found the Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*), Asian Koel (*Eudynamys scolopacea*), Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*), and a flock of Indian Silverbill (*Lonchura malabarica*). Other members of the group spotted the Small Minivet (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*), White-browed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*), Tickell's or Pale-billed Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*), Plum-headed Parakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*) and Black-rumped

Flameback (*Dinopium benghalense*). Their incredible sightings made us wish we had gone along with them!



Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

After walking for about one hour we reached the lake. This place is a nesting site for Red-wattled Lapwings (*Vanellus indicus*). We sighted two birds calling in alarm and flying round the area, possibly because their nests filled with water due to the previous night's rain and they couldn't spot their chicks. We slowly moved forward from that place and spotted a single Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*) sitting on a completely bare tree.



Jungle Babbler (Photo: Vijay Menon)

The time came to re-energise ourselves. As soon as Shafaat Uncle declared we eat breakfast, we all sat down comfortably, opened our 'stocks', and the 'picnic' started. As always, it was great fun sharing 'tiffins'. It reminded me of my school days. After finishing our breakfast we started back and found a Grey-breasted Prinia (*Prinia hodgsonii*) near the Palace. It was first identified by its call, which was a little different from that of the more commonly found Ashy Prinia. On the way back we saw the Grey Francolin (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) and Oriental Magpie Robin (*Copsychus saularis*).



**Green Bee-eater** (Photo: Vijay Menon)

Visible all along the trip were the overhead ‘swift’ flights of the Asian Palm Swift (*Cypsiurus balasiensis*) and House Swift (*Apus affinis*). Commoners like the Spotted Dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*), Green Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*), Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*), Indian Robin (*Saxicoloides fulicata*), Pied Bushchat (*Saxicola caprata*), Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*), Yellow-billed Babbler (*Turdoides affinis*), and House Crow (*Corvus splendens*) also flitted about.



**Red-vented Bulbul** (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)



**Indian Grey Hornbill** (Photo: Vijay Menon)

We were about to reach the Masjid near the main gate when one of our birder friends spotted a pair of Indian Grey Hornbills (*Ocyceros birostris*) on top of a tree, just beside the road. We all ran back, saw those two big birds, tried to focus, but they flew away! However, we managed to catch the Tickell's Blue Flycatcher through the lens! With that we completed our trip and departed with ‘colourful’ memories.



**Indian Peafowl (female)** (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

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## **Report – Indoor Meeting – 28<sup>th</sup> June 2012**

Surekha Aitabathula

On the last Thursday of June, we watched the final episode of ‘*The Splendour of Australian Birds*’. Laughter broke out as the film opened with the maniacal calls of the Kookaburras. The bird’s name is onomatopoeic to its call. This 11-to-17 inch terrestrial kingfisher has an uncannily loud call akin to human laughter. This is what the bird books say but I thought the calls sounded more like a high decibel, cacophonous, protest call in a raging

fight. With a life span of a neat twenty years, kookaburras are carnivorous with the wide-ranging menu consisting of lizards, small reptiles, birds, mice and, sometimes, unattended barbecues. The camera must have been placed inside the nest, for we got a clear ring-side view of the parent Kookaburra feeding a wide range of animals to its young.

After the Kookaburra, came the Double-eyed Fig Parrot. Of all the Australian parrots, this is the smallest. It is predominantly green with the male having more red in the face than the female. It has a short tail and a disproportionately large head and bill, and red and blue facial markings. Its name is derived from the cheek patches of some of its sub-species that vaguely resemble eyes. It generally forages for figs, berries, seeds and nectar. Flight is quick and direct, and its call is short and shrill. Unlike many other parrots that generally use existing holes on trees for nests, Double-eyed Fig Parrots excavate their own nest cavities, usually in a rotten tree.

Another marvellous bird was the Letter-winged Kite (*Elanus scriptus*). This small, rare and irruptive raptor found in Central Australia is similar in appearance to our own Black-shouldered Kite except for the distinctive black underwing pattern like a shallow 'M' seen in flight. This kite is a nocturnal hunter, first described by ornithologist John Gould in 1842. *Scriptus* in Latin means 'written' or 'marked'. The fierce red eyes with a surrounding black eye patch, yellow nostril and hooked black beak make this raptor look rakishly beautiful.

The Shining Starling (*Alponis metallica*) with its brilliant red eyes and green-glossed metallic black plumage is a

stunning beauty. Its eyes look like bright red bulbs! This bird is iridescent all over!

Next stop in the film was at the Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory of Australia, 171 km Southeast from Darwin. The park covers an area of 19,804 square kilometres which is almost the size of Slovenia. This Park is home to around 280 bird species, 10,000 insect species, 60 mammal species and 1600 plant species. Freshwater and Saltwater Crocodiles thrive here.

Freshwater crocodiles can be identified by their narrow snout and a single row of large bony lumps called 'scutes'. Saltwater crocodiles do not have these and their snouts are broader. The maximum size for a 'Freshie' is 3 metres, whereas a 'Saltie' can exceed 6 metres. Crocodiles are fascinating to watch. They are a symbol of agility, power and immense strength. There is no escaping, once the fearsome and powerful jaws clamp shut on their prey. It is said to pull down even a Bison!

Thus ended the fabulous film. A special thanks to our member, Asif Husain Arastu for sharing this enjoyable and informative DVD with us.

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### Bird Humour



(From Times of India, 25-06-2012)

## **The Determined Mother – Story of an Indian Robin**

Wg Cdr Y Prakash Rao

A pair of Indian Robins began their search for a new home sometime around the end of February 2012. They probably were very happy to find twin wooden nests placed by me on a concrete pillar, one facing east and the other west. It took no time for them to colonize both the nests and they simultaneously started the process of filling the nests with suitable nesting material. During this process they drove away a pair of house sparrows who too were eyeing one of the nests. The male predominantly brought material into the western nest while the female carried it to the eastern one.

The female won round one! It had laid a clutch of two eggs in the eastern nest (the one it prepared) between 14<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> March. During the hatching process the male was found feeding the female in the nest. The hatching was complete by the 26<sup>th</sup>. Unfortunately these chicks did not survive. I saw the female carrying away the dead corpse in pieces. It could not be ascertained if it had consumed the same. On 27<sup>th</sup> March I found the nest devoid of any remnants of the chicks.

In a few days' time, the pair started bringing nesting material to the western nest and three eggs were laid between 10<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> April. The chicks hatched between 21<sup>st</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup> April. The feeding of chicks was dominated by the male and one of the days it was seen feeding the young 30 minutes after sunset. The chicks fledged on 7<sup>th</sup> May in the morning hours. After almost two months I can still see them foraging around and now I can identify with certainty that one of them is a male and the rest female.

In the third round, three eggs were laid in the western nest around 19<sup>th</sup> May. None of them hatched this time, probably due to high ambient temperatures. While the female was busy incubating the eggs, the male was seen escorting the foraging chicks around. The female was also seen feeding these chicks during the breaks!

Surprisingly, the female continued to lay eggs and this time around 12<sup>th</sup> June, it laid two in the Western nest and one in the Eastern nest. I removed the egg from the Eastern nest and put it along with the other two. I felt extremely sad to notice that the male robin was missing from the scene since 18<sup>th</sup> June. I looked for any tell-tale signs but could not gather any. In the absence of its mate the female used to take frequent breaks from incubating to feed around.

The first rains around 16<sup>th</sup> June signalled good weather and abundant food. Two of the eggs hatched on 23<sup>rd</sup> June. The mother, in the absence of its mate, was toiling from sunrise to sunset to keep the chicks well-fed. Everything seems to be working well for the two young chicks with good rain, pleasant temperatures and adequate food. They seem to be on the correct growth curve. I can hear them constantly chirping for their mother, probably asking to be fed. I often wonder if all three eggs had hatched, would the mother robin have been able to feed the three all by herself.

Well done, Mother Robin! I am sure you will see your young ones take wings soon. Happy Hunting and Happy Landings.

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**Editor's Note:** In the above article, the author mentions "...I removed the egg from the Eastern nest and put it along with the other two...". We would like to state for the record that this was probably done in all good faith, but it is possible that such an action may lead to the bird abandoning the egg or even the entire nest, and hence should be avoided.

**Tawny-bellied Babbler (*Dumetia hyperythra*)**



**Tawny-bellied Babbler**  
(Ananthagiri, 28-05-2011)

Order: Passeriformes

Family: Timaliidae

Genus: *Dumetia*

Species: *D. hyperythra*

Size: 13-14 cm

**Description:** The Tawny-bellied Babbler is one of the Old World babblers, which are a large family of passerines characterized by soft, fluffy plumage. These are tropical birds, with a great variety seen in different parts of Asia.

The Tawny-bellied Babbler is a small babbler at only 13-14cm, including the long tail. It has olive-brown or dark brown upperparts and rusty or orange-buff underparts with, sometimes, a rufous grey crown. There are four races based on colouration, of which the southern populations have whiter throats, and *D. h. hyperythra* seen in eastern India has a throat concolorous with its underparts. The sexes are alike.

It is widely distributed, being seen in India from the Himalayas southwards, the south-western parts of Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. It is a resident breeder across its range.

**Behaviour:** It is usually seen singly or in small, active, vocal groups of 5-10. Its habitat is lightly-wooded thorny

scrub, tall grasslands, and sometimes, the lower bushes of a forest. It has short, rounded wings, and a weak flight and maybe as a result, is usually seen hopping from branch to branch. Like most babblers, it is not migratory. Its diet consists mainly of insects, larvae and flower nectar.

Flocks of Tawny-bellied Babblers keep in touch with feeble but sharp cheeping calls ('sweech', 'sweech'). When alarmed, they scatter and dive, uttering harsh, tittering sounds, and reassemble with more agitated tittering and cheeping. One call can be heard here. 

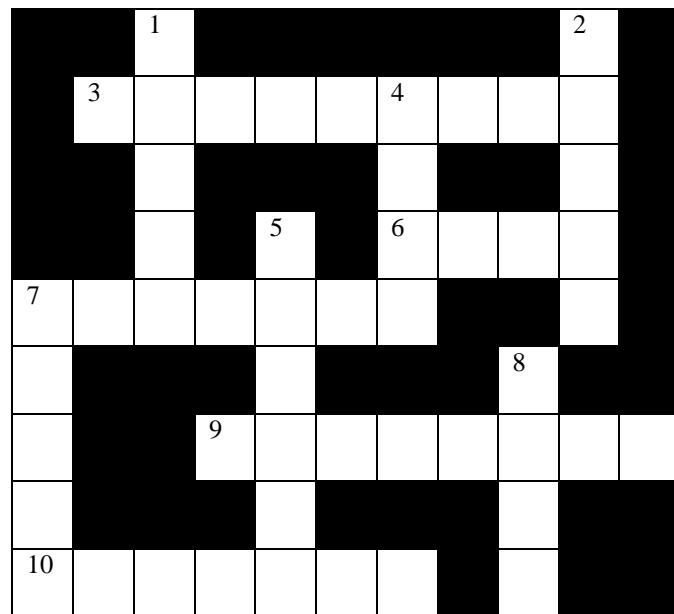
**Nesting:** The Tawny-bellied Babbler breeds mainly between May and September (November to March in Sri Lanka). Its nest is a neat ball of coarse grass and bamboo leaves lined with softer grass, leaves and rootlets, with an entrance hole on the side. The nest is usually built in a bush less than 1m above the ground, hidden in dense foliage. The clutch consists of 3-4 glossy pinkish-white eggs, highly speckled and blotched with reddish or dark brown stains.

**Local name:** It is known as 'shah dumri' in Hindi, 'pandijitta' in Telugu, 'karamadi laledo' in Gujarati and 'chinna chilappan' in Malayalam.

## **BIRDING CROSSWORD #7**

Umesh Mani

The answers to the clues given below are bird names or other birding-related terms. Let's see how many you can find!  
(*Solutions in next month's Pitta*)



### **ACROSS**

3 - The 'black magic woman' will do with hesitation (9)  
6 - Tailless madman! (4)  
7 - At last, a cooling device? (7)  
9 - A classical music composition on the ground (8)  
10 - The daily practice at your living place (7)

### **DOWN**

1 - Sounds like he is stealing (5)  
2 - A machine to stretch your neck (5)  
4 - Use the telephone to summon someone? (4)  
5 - Never says anything original (6)  
7 - It flies a short distance to meet a fathead! (5)  
8 - That sounds like the call-bell (4)

Solutions to Crossword #6 (Pitta, June 2012)

**ACROSS:** 1 – SHEARWATER, 4 – WADER, 6 – CUCKOO, 7 – CLUTCH, 11 – WHEATEAR  
**DOWN:** 2 - HAWKS, 3 - THRUSH, 5 – NODDY, 8 – LAPWING, 9 - TREEPIE, 10 - GULAR

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# JP TIGA

Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh  
New Series Volume 9 Number 8 August 2012

## FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 19<sup>th</sup> August 2012, 6.00AM: Ananthagiri Hills Reserve Forest.

With the monsoons in full swing and great weather prevailing, the day should make for not only a pleasant woodland walk, but also great birding. Ananthagiri has never disappointed and is a paradise for forest birds. One can see Flycatchers, White-eyes, Chloropsis, the Orange-headed Ground Thrush, Nightjars, among others. The Indian Pitta and the Brown Fish Owl have been reported earlier.

This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

## Trip Report – Mrugavani National Park, Chilkur – 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2012

Text: Dr Nupur; Photos: Dr Samuel Sukumar



Pied Crested Cuckoo

On a monsoon Sunday morning we set out for the Chilkur Deer Park situated 25 kms from Hyderabad. We all met at the gate at 6:30 am. After an initial hiccup we entered the park.

The weather gods seemed to be happy with us as there was a lull in the incessant downpour which had lashed the city the last 2 days. There were 10 of us and one local guide, Rajinder, who opened the gates for us and took us to areas otherwise not open to public. Surekha had dug

up her wardrobe and was in subdued colours for a change much to Amardeep's surprise! We were a happy mix, some of us were amateurs and some seasoned birders.

We were greeted by the rich, spluttering call of the White-browed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*) and the koo-ooing of the Asian Koel (*Eudynamys scolopaceus*). While Asif was negotiating with Rajinder we saw a dainty little Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*) carrying nesting material, going to and fro from a shrub to a tree.

The Pied Crested Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*), the harbinger of monsoon, was spotted several times, often in a pair. It's a handsome black and white migratory bird that comes all the way from Africa, I learned. It is also called the Jacobin Cuckoo and "chatak" in Hindi.

The flora consisted of thick, deciduous forest, interspersed with rocky formations. Bamboos & Flame of the Forest (not in bloom) were abundant. The place was teeming with butterflies of all hues, none of us being conversant with the species. Purple-rumped and Purple Sunbirds (*Nectarinia zeylonica* and *N. asiatica* respectively) were flying about chirruping away and the Indian Robin (*Saxicoloides fulicatus*) also made its appearance frequently. Common Hoopoes (*Upupa epops*) were foraging in the fields; a duo with their striking plumage and open crests was a mesmerizing sight to the eyes.



Spotted Deer

Spotted Deer or the *Chital* were looking docile in their large enclosures. Langurs were in plenty. Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*) and Common Iora (*Aegithina tiphia*) were heard singing and whistling several times but they were elusive in their appearance.



Small Minivet

The most stunning sighting of the day were the Small Minivets (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*); the male striking with its brilliant, scarlet underparts. Picture perfect, a pair obliged us with a long viewing.

There were several water bodies in the park, some freshly created because of the torrential rain. Among the water birds were the Lesser Whistling-duck (*Dendrocygna javanica*), Indian Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*), White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*), Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*), White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*), Spot-billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*) and Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*).

We saw several insects; Mayank, a zoology student, enlightened us with their names - Red Velvet Bugs, Black-spotted Beetles, Crickets, etc.

We kept hearing the repetitive call, ascending to a crescendo, of the Common Hawk Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*), also called the Brain Fever Bird, throughout the trip. This lead to a discussion on why it is called the brain fever bird. The reason being the call - a repetitive three-note call - which sounds like 'brain fever'. We were finally rewarded with a sighting towards the end of our walk.

We also got frequent glimpses of the Plain Prinia (*Prinia inornata*) and Yellow-billed Babblers (*Turdoides affinis*). We spent considerable time on the watch tower which gave us a magnificent view of the thick forest. It had a calm air about it.

The only thing that marred the beautiful Sunday morning with perfect weather was the absence of the Blue-faced Malkoha which is usually spotted here.



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Editor's Note: Chilkur seems to have been the 'Flavour of the Month' – we had another team visiting Chilkur in July, whose report is given below, focusing more on the lake beside Chilkur forest.

## **Trip Report – Mrugavani National Park, Chilkur – 7<sup>th</sup> July 2012**

Text: Nilay Raha; Photos: Humayun Taher



On 7<sup>th</sup> July 2012, four of us birders - Anjali Pande, Humayun Taher, Shafaat Ulla and I, went to Mrugavani National Park in Chilkur, about 18-20 kms away from Hyderabad. Covering around 900 acres, Chilkur forest houses 400 deer and is known as 'Birdwatchers' Paradise'. We are thankful to forest official Mr. Prem Sagar, not only for giving us permission to enter, but also for arranging a guide - Kumar, who patiently and efficiently took us through the forest.

The weather was very pleasant as it had rained the previous night and the park looked lush and green. This made us very optimistic about spotting various species as we looked forward to a pleasurable and fruitful Sunday morning. We spotted 43 species and at least 3-4 Pied Crested Cuckoos (*Clamator jacobinus*). This migrant is not so commonly seen and it was indeed very interesting to see them around.



**Common Leopard**

Being nature lovers, we couldn't take our eyes away from the beautiful butterflies that were flying around us.

It is 'Incredible India' indeed, as our country hosts over 1500 species of butterflies.

The butterflies we saw were: Common Mormon *Papilio polytes* (*Linnaeus*), Common Emigrant *Catopsilia pomona* (*Fabricius*), Crimson Tip *Colotis danae* (*Fabricius*), Plain Orange Tip *Colotis eucaris* (*Fabricius*), Common Pierrot *Castalius rosimon* (*Fabricius*), Plain Tiger *Danaus chrysippus* (*Linnaeus*), Glassy Tiger *Parantica aglea* (*Stoll*), Common Crow *Euploea core* (*Cramer*) and Common Leopard *Phalanta phalantha* (*Drury*).

After breakfast we drove to a lake next to Chilkur forest and here we spotted 21 species of birds, including a Yellow-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus malabaricus*) - the highlight of the day! Shafaat Ulla had visited this lake almost 5-6 years back and he could recollect seeing Yellow-wattled Lapwings near this lake. Hence, as soon we reached this place, we kept our eyes glued for this bird and soon enough we saw a lone Yellow-wattled Lapwing guarding its territory. We were elated! We observed its specifications very closely, especially its size as compared to the Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*) and its bright, yellow fleshy lappets above and in front of eyes. Humayun and Anjali were also able to take good photographs of it.

Loud alarm calls of the Red-wattled Lapwings drew us on. March to August is the nesting season of this species, and we saw a nesting pair on the ground. Meanwhile, we spotted a pair of Common Mynas attacking a Mongoose along with a few Red-wattled Lapwings.

The lake was full of water. It was very interesting to see so many water birds during monsoon. The birds we saw were Intermediate Egrets (*Mesophoyx intermedia*), Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*), Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*), Purple Swamphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*), White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*), Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) and Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*). We also saw three resident species of Ducks - Cotton Pygmy-goose (*Nettapus coromandelianus*), Lesser Whistling-duck (*Dendrocygna javanica*) and Spot-billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*).

On the ground, near the lake we saw a Paddyfield Pipit (*Anthus rufulus*), Tawny Pipit (*Anthus campestris*), Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark (*Eremopterix grisea*) and a White-browed Wagtail (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*). There were lot of House Swifts (*Apus affinis*) and Swallows flying around us.

Humayun got lucky and captured a beautiful photograph of a Red-rumped Swallow (*Hirundo daurica*). Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) were also present in the colony. Like all good things, this trip also came to an end and as we were taking stock of the interesting sightings of the day, I saw the beautiful Brahminy Starling (*Sturnus*

*pagodarum*) and Scaly-breasted Munia (*Lonchura punctulata*) bidding us adieu.



**Red-rumped Swallow**

While sipping tea near Himayatsagar, we observed the activities of 5-6 House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) around the shop. It was very satisfying for all of us to see this common species around Hyderabad which is on the brink of extinction, both in urban and rural areas. The decline of this bird is an indicator of the continuous degradation of the environment and calls for urgent measures to conserve the House Sparrow.

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### Indoor Meeting – 28<sup>th</sup> June 2012

### **PEAK OIL AND WILDLIFE**

T Vijayendra & Shashank Srinivasan

#### **Wildlife Conservation is failing**

As we all know, the main issue in conservation is habitat loss. The main reason for this habitat loss is our industrial civilization. The *mantra* of industrial society is development and growth at any cost. Its attitude towards nature is to *conquer and exploit* it. Our conservation efforts are not succeeding and the tribe of conservationists is also not increasing, because most of us are obliged to work within the system and our government is dedicated to the growth paradigm. Three things need to happen to enable us to do anything worthwhile on a significant scale. The first is the end of industrial society, the second is a transition to a society based on lower energy and equity and the third is to change humanity's attitude towards nature.

#### **Peak Oil - A Silver Lining**

The material basis for an industrial society is a concentrated source of energy or fossil fuels. The industrial revolution began with coal in the 19th century, and in the 20th century has moved on to oil. Fossil fuels are non-renewable finite resources and are, thus, exhaustible. Peak oil is not about when we run out of oil, but rather, when the production of oil starts to decline, and this peak has already been reached. The Peak Oil crisis began with the rise in petroleum prices. In 2008 it reached USD 147, ushering in an economic crisis - a recession in North America, Europe and Japan. This economic crisis, as we know, is leading to a worldwide collapse of the financial system. After the housing crisis, there was the financial meltdown, then the debt crisis in Greece, Ireland, Italy, Spain and Portugal. Due to global recession, the demand for oil and, therefore, its price tends to fall. Still it will never go back to the old prices.

The empire is imploding and collapsing. Whether the collapse comes in a couple of years or a decade is not predictable. But irrespective of the date, the world has to either face chaos or prepare for a transition to a society based on lower energy and equity. What does it hold for wildlife?

### **Can Peak Oil Help Conservation?**

If the industrial collapse occurs, it is tempting to speculate that many ills of such a society will go away. For example with the fall of industrial activity, carbon dioxide emission will fall and global warming will slow down. The ill effects of the past few decades cannot be wiped out but the future will be safer for all life on earth. Similarly, further habitat loss may not occur and wildlife habitat can even increase. Whether there will be chaos or a smooth transition, depends a lot upon human society. We will consider three different possibilities and try to visualize where and how it will happen with reference to wildlife:

#### **1. Where it will Worsen Conservation Efforts**

Many scientists believe that the time for action is over and we will face 'Apocalypse!' 'We are in for a period of sustained chaos whose magnitude we are unable to foresee'. There will be no funds for conservation efforts and wildlife habitats will be plundered even more, at a faster rate. It will be a grim period lasting maybe several decades, and once humanity exhausts itself, a recovery may occur. It is difficult to say how this scenario will unfold, but it will definitely take place in some parts of the world and unfortunately it might happen in large parts of our country too. However, as humans, we are optimistic and so let us look at some more optimistic scenarios.

#### **2. Conservation can occur by Default**

It is possible that in some countries social revolution can occur with an explicit aim of reducing energy consumption and equality. Cuba is a living example. Cuba is a small country in the Caribbean, with a population of about 11 million. In 1959 they had a revolution whose original revolutionary agenda, was industrialisation with equity. But in 1989 something happened! Because of the US embargo, the Soviet Union was the only source of oil for Cuba. In 1989, the Soviet system had begun to collapse and Cuba stopped receiving petroleum from the Soviets. Cuba is where "Peak Oil" hit in 1989 - in an artificial manner - because in the world as a whole, there was no shortage of oil. The year 1989 ushered in the 'Special Period' in Cuba, where we can see the whole experience of Peak oil, economic crisis and recovery. The special period in Cuba is like a real time model; large enough to prove its viability.

#### **Wildlife in Cuba**

Since consumption declined sharply and Cuba has taken the path of scaling down with equity, wildlife has

flourished by default. Cuba has 263 protected natural areas, which cover nearly 22 percent of its territory. There are six places in Cuba that have been added to Ramsar Convention's List of Wetlands of International Importance. Cuba is a place of unimagined biodiversity. Cuba is another Galapagos, preserved by its lack of 'development' and by the will of a people committed to conservation. Stretching for 1,200 kilometres, Cuba embraces the greatest diversity of landscapes and life in the West Indies. At 1.5 million acres, the Cienaga de Zapata Biosphere Reserve is Cuba's largest protected area, designated as a Wetland of International Importance, mainly for aquatic birds. One remote and still unprotected corner of the Zapata swamp is home to more than 3,000 Cuban crocodiles, the largest remaining population of this endangered and fierce species.'

#### **3. Where Wildlife Will Flourish: Transition Towns**

For fulfilling the third condition and to change humanity's attitude towards nature, we have to look at the work done by the Transition Town Movement. It is a grassroots network of communities that are working to build resilience in response to peak oil, climate destruction, and economic instability. It is an environmental and social movement founded on the principles of permaculture. These techniques were included in a student project overseen by permaculture teacher Rob Hopkins at the Kinsale Further Education College in Ireland. Two of his students took the far-reaching step of presenting it to Kinsale Town Council, resulting in the historic decision by councillors to adopt the plan and work towards energy independence. The idea was adapted and expanded through 2005, 2006 and the initiative spread quickly, and as of May 2010, there are over 400 communities recognized as official Transition Towns in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Italy, and Chile.

Central to the transition town movement is the idea that a life without oil could in fact be far more enjoyable and fulfilling than the present: "by shifting our mindset we can actually recognise the coming post-cheap oil era as an opportunity rather than a threat, and design the future low carbon age to be thriving, resilient and abundant - somewhere much better to live than our current alienated consumer culture based on greed, war and the myth of perpetual growth."

An essential aspect of transition in many places is that the outer work of transition needs to be matched by inner transition. In order to reduce our dependence on energy we need to rebuild our relations with ourselves, with each other and with the natural world. That requires focusing on the heart and soul of transition.

### Transition Town and Wildlife

By their very nature, transition towns tend to be more wildlife-friendly than traditional towns. Transport in transition towns tends towards cycling or walking, both of which are non-polluting, slow-moving and relatively quiet; by reducing road kill, pollution and noise, birds and other forms of small wildlife have a larger presence within such communities. With increased composting, reduced plastic and processed food usage and reduced waste, the population of common scavengers (such as feral dogs, crows and other human co-dependent species) is lowered, allowing for a larger diversity of actual wildlife. In community gardens and farms, organic farming practices permit a diversity of insect life, which in turn supports a larger diversity of their natural predators. These are all passive benefits that arise from the nature of transition communities; by consciously choosing a sustainable low-impact lifestyle, there are obvious benefits to the surrounding environment. In addition to this peaceful coexistence with wildlife, adoption of measures by transition towns to actively create wildlife habitat within their communities and to create a true forest-town community, will go a long way towards helping wildlife flourish once the age of oil is over.

### The Indian Scene

Though most of our conservation efforts have failed, let us also look at the successes and areas where we can go forward. In our opinion the most promising area for future is conservation education of the young and community-based conservation projects. Bird conservation in Kokkare Bellur, Karnataka, is a good example of this.

Kokkare Bellur village is situated about 80 km from Bangalore. For six months of the year, from December till June, Spot-billed Pelicans and Painted Storks nest in breeding colonies on tall trees in the very heart of the village. The people of the village are proud of their long association with the birds, which they nickname 'daughters of the village'. However, during the past two decades, the growing pressure of population has led to increased demand on the trees as a resource for cooking, animal fodder and fruit for sale. The lakes and tanks where the pelicans forage are also undergoing constant changes induced by fertiliser and pesticide inflow and traditional fisheries are getting converted to commercial

ones. Yet another danger is that of poaching, as some communities like to eat pelican flesh. Thirty years ago, according to the villagers' estimates, there were more than 1000 pairs of pelicans; today, the number is about 160.

Since 1994, Manu K., a member of a local environmental group, Mysore Amateur Naturalists (MAN), has been actively involved in the conservation of pelicans and their habitat in Kokkare Bellur, promoting the re-establishment of harmony between birds and humans. A grassroots action group, *Hejjarle Balaga* (Pelican Clan), consisting largely of young people from the village, runs a conservation pen for 'orphan' chicks which fall from their nests and would otherwise perish on the ground. The chicks are eventually returned to the wild where they join their naturally raised siblings without any problem of re-adaptation. The approach of Hejjarle Balaga is to combine care for the human community with conservation and protection of the birds. So tree planting, (including a nursery to grow saplings) and educational activities are also carried out.

What is in store for the future? The worst-case scenario is that rich countries will refuse to reduce their consumption and will continue to try to get hold of the remaining resources through wars. This will result in a worldwide collapse bringing misery to all. The optimistic scenario can be a mixed bag with different things happening in different countries. India is a subcontinent and has different levels of development and political experience in different parts of the country. So all the three types of scenario can take place - there may be chaos and lawlessness, socialist revolutions with or without newer kinds of agenda, and small groups, even communities, experimenting with local level 'transition town' kind of activities. There is evidence of all these around us and it can move towards better or worse as the events unfold. To a smaller extent it also depends what we, as naturalists, do.

*This is an abridged version of the talk. For full text, write to the authors at:*

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## **Trip Report – Ananthagiri Hills & Kotepally Reservoir – 30<sup>th</sup> June 2012**

Text: Bindu Madhavi Racherla; Photos: Humayun Taher



Keeping in view the downpour of the previous day, I kept my fingers crossed when I woke up early on 30<sup>th</sup> June for our visit to Ananthagiri Hills. Thankfully the skies were clear and remained so as Humayun, myself, Sivaji and Prasad headed towards Ananthagiri.

The road to Ananthagiri skirts the Chilkur Deer Park. Just before we reached the park gates, we saw a pair of Grey Francolin (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) crossing the road and entering the nearby bushes. We stopped the car to observe them and saw four juvenile birds along with the adults, running into the bushes. The bird had a pale buff coloured ring around the eye, eyebrows & throat and the rest of the body was barred. We also heard the call of Painted Francolin (*Francolinus pictus*). En route to Ananthagiri, we saw more than 100 Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) along the road at various places. Other commoners were the Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*), House Crow (*Corvus splendens*) and Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*).

Having reached Ananthagiri, we parked our car near the temple and took the broad steps down into the valley. A Red-rumped Swallow (*Cecropis daurica*) was seen flying into one of the nearby rocky caves. We approached this cave and, fixed to the roof, was the nest of this bird built on the roof. Stuck firmly on, the nest had an egg-shaped chamber made of mud with the entrance in the form of an elongated tunnel. As we walked further on towards the first of the valley's huge mango trees, we spotted a Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*) perched on the branches. Further ahead, on another tree we saw a pair of White-browed Fantails (*Rhipidura aureola*) restlessly moving around on the branches. We also saw Oriental White-Eyes (*Zosterops palpebrosus*), Blue-winged Leafbird (*Chloropsis cochinchinensis*), Common Iora

(*Aegithina tiphia*) and Yellow-billed Babblers (*Turdoides affinis*).



**Indian Grey Hornbill**

As we took the path down to the valley, we saw a Black-rumped Flameback (*Dinopium benghalense*) in flight. On a large neem tree, 10-12 Indian Grey Hornbills (*Ocyceros birostris*) were seen. Crested Treeswifts (*Hemiprocne coronata*) were also seen flying around in the forest.

Further along the way we were able to spot Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*), Plum-headed Parakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*), Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*), White-browed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*), Purple-rumped Sunbird (*Leptocoma zeylonica*), Jungle Babbler (*Turdoides striata*), Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*), Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*), Spotted Dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*), Oriental Magpie Robin (*Copsychus saularis*), Pied Bushchat (*Saxicola caprata*) and Common Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*).

The day seemed quite lucky for us. As we walked further into the forest, beyond the Eucalyptus plantation, we saw a fairly large herd of Spotted Deer (*Axis axis*). The herd appeared to number about 30-plus animals - adult and young. Further up, we reached a small dam, blocking a streamlet in the forest. The stream was dry, despite the rains of the past few days. We stopped here to rest for a while. On a dry shrub adjacent to the bund, a pair of Indian Silverbills (*Lonchura malabarica*) was playing around. As they flew away from the tree, a pair of Scaly-breasted Munias (*Lonchura punctulata*) came and sat on the same tree.

Suddenly Humayun spotted a small bird that has descended to the ground singing. It was identified as Oriental Skylark (*Alauda gulgula*), but before I could have a clear view of it through the binocs, it flew away. We also saw a Short-toed Snake Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*) and a Changeable Hawk Eagle (*Spizaetus cirrhatus*) soaring in the sky. Suddenly, a very loud and noisy call was heard from a nearby grove of densely foliaged trees. As we approached nearer to identify the bird that was calling, we saw a pair of adult Asian Paradise-flycatchers (*Terpsiphone paradisi*) along with a juvenile playing around the trees. It seems that a trip to Ananthagiri is never complete and satisfactory without having at least one glimpse of these Flycatchers.

We walked back through the Eucalyptus plantation. On a distant tall, single-stemmed Eucalyptus tree we saw a large nest of the Changeable Hawk Eagle. The nest was built in the crotch of three vertical branches. I understand from Humayun and Sivaji that most eagles build their nest once, and year after year they add twigs and branches to the existing structure, making it bigger and bigger.

Other birds seen included the Common Woodshrike (*Tephrodornis pondicerianus*), Plain Prinia (*Prinia inornata*), Chestnut-shouldered Petronia (*Petronia xanthocollis*), Small Minivets (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*) and Pied Bushchat (*Saxicola caprata*).

Coming back out of the valley, we decided to explore the area beyond the TB sanatorium where there is a view point which provides a good view of the valley, the surrounding villages and cultivated areas and a few water bodies. Here we saw a Changeable Hawk Eagle fly just above our heads. At this close range we could clearly see the white, barred underparts and the black crest over the head. Near the view point we heard continuous calls of Common Hawk Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*) along with the calls of Plaintive Cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerinus*) and Asian Koel (*Eudynamys scolopaceus*).

An interesting observation we made during the trip is that, both, in the valley and at the view point, the Common Hawk Cuckoo was calling almost continuously. There appeared to be a large population of these birds in this

area and they were very vocal. We wondered if this had anything to do with the season. Salim Ali and Dillon Ripley mention the bird to be "silent in winter and then very liable to be passed over as absent. With the approach of the hot weather, becomes increasingly vocal, vocalization peaking by about May; thereafter gradually reverting to silence by August/September. Calling is monotonous and often almost throughout the day and during moonlit nights." (Ali & Ripley, 1981). This seems to be slightly in variance with our observations. We are not sure if the calling pattern is different in the south.



The day had been planned as a full day trip, so in the afternoon we went to the Kotepally Reservoir, which is 15 km. away from Ananthagiri. At Kotepally, keeping in view of the time and the activity of birds, we had our lunch and rested under a tree. River Terns (*Sterna aurantia*), Whiskered Terns (*Chlidonias hybridus*), House Swifts (*Apus affinis*) and Asian Palm Swifts (*Cypsiurus balasiensis*) were seen hovering around the lake and a pair of Brahminy Kites (*Haliastur indus*) were soaring over the water.



Sykes's Crested Lark

A few Sykes's Crested Larks (*Galerida deva*), a bird which is endemic to the Deccan region, was spotted on the open grass; its prominent crest, overall rufous colouration and pale rufous underparts were clearly visible. On the far bank of the lake we saw a pair of Black Ibis (*Pseudibis papillosa*), Little Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax niger*), Large Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*) and an Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*). Here we also saw a pair of Pied Kingfishers (*Ceryle rudis*) along with a juvenile, fishing in a small rain-water pond, somewhat cut off from the main lake. The juvenile Kingfisher was repeatedly trying to catch the fish, but in vain.



**Red-wattled Lapwing nest**

Close to this rain-water pond, a pair of Red-wattled Lapwings (*Vanellus indicus*) was seen, but their strangely silent behaviour caught our attention. Humayun observed something on the ground. We approached closer and saw a nest of the lapwing, in which were three black-blotched buff eggs and a newly hatched chick – all of them superbly camouflaged. The nest was made by neatly arranging pebbles in a circular form. We had a very quick look at the nest and then moved away so as to not disturb the birds and also to prevent predators from seeing the nest.

As we moved away from the nest, we saw the female lapwing moving towards the nest in a phased manner, halting at different places and checking whether we were far enough from the nest for it to return, and then going closer. We saw it dip its belly feathers in the water and then finally move towards the nest. It was obvious that the bird did this deliberately and only then sat on the eggs and chick in order to keep them cool in the hot weather. This observation was very interesting.



**Red-wattled Lapwing incubating**

Later when we read about it, we learned that “Like other lapwings, **they soak their belly feathers to provide water to their chicks as well as to cool the eggs during hot weather.**” (Sundaram, 1989; Kalsi & Khera, 1990). There are numerous references to several species of plovers indulging in this behaviour. This belly-wetting behaviour is found mostly in sandgrouse and plovers; which makes sense, given that they build their nests on the bare ground amongst rocks that can get quite hot.

The other birds seen in this area were White-browed Wagtail (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*), Rufous-tailed Lark (*Ammomanes phoenicura*), Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*), Tawny Pipit (*Anthus campestris*), Dusky Crag Martin (*Hirundo concolor*), Common Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*), Large Egret (*Ardea alba*), Intermediate Egret (*Egretta intermedia*), Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*) and Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*).

Deciding to return we took the path over the dam wall. On one side we could see the swifts and terns hovering over the lake, and on the other side we could see a small path leading to nearby fields. Here, we saw dozens of Baya Weavers (*Ploceus philippinus*) nesting on two trees. Further up, we surprised a Monitor Lizard (*Varanus bengalensis*) walking along the path.

We then decided to visit the other side of the Ananthagiri valley. We drove down the valley and halted near to a large fruiting ficus tree. There was no birding activity initially when we reached there, but as the evening approached, at around 4.30 PM, birds started flocking to the fruiting tree. First to arrive were the Brahminy Starlings (*Sturnus pagodarum*), followed by Rufous Treepie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*), Golden Oriole (*Oriolus kundoo*), Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*) and an Orange-headed Thrush (*Zosterops citrina*) flying across.



Oriental White-eye building nest

On a small tree next to this one, we noticed a pair of Oriental White-eyes building their nest. The interesting point I observed here is that at no point is the nest left unattended. When one bird brings nesting material and adds it to the nest, it waits until the other one arrives, and only then does it leave the nest. They checked the stability of the nest and then shot out of the nest in search of more nesting material. The birds were least disturbed by our presence.

While returning to Hyderabad, between Vikarabad and Chevella, near a water body, we saw two pairs of Woolly-necked Storks (*Ciconia episcopus*), a single Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*), Black Ibis and White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) and further up, a Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*) sitting on an electric wire.

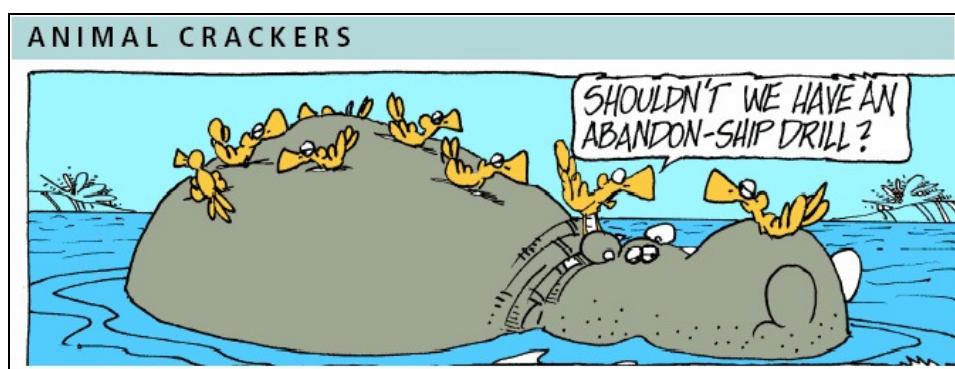
With a tally of over 80 species we were all very happy with our sightings and interesting observations. We treated ourselves to a cuppa *chai* along the way and headed back to the city.

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#### Bird Humour



(From Times of India, 21-06-2012)

## **Bird of the Month**

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

### **Common Iora (*Aegithinina typhia*)**



**Common Iora Male (L) and Female (R)**

Order: Passeriformes

Family: Aegithinidae

Genus: *Aegithina*

Species: *A. typhia*

Size: 14 cm

**Description:** The Common Iora is a small passerine seen across the Indian subcontinent (except the Northwest). Though they are predominantly black and yellow (or yellowish-green), there is considerable variation in plumage between the races. Breeding males of *A. t. multicolor* of South India show a uniformly black crown and mantle, which changes to black mixed with a lot of yellow (*A. t. humei* of central India) or mainly yellowish-green (*A. t. tiphia* of the Himalayas and the north-east).

The Common Iora is sexually dimorphic, with the male having black wings and tail, and the female having greenish wings and olive tail. Females and non-breeding males have yellow-to-greenish upperparts and yellow underparts. Besides the two white wing-bars becoming more prominent during breeding season, breeding males also develop a black head and back, though the black can be quite variable, thus leading to the male being easily confused with the Marshall's Iora. (The Marshall's Iora, however, always has white tips to the tail). It has a pointed, notched beak with a straight culmen. The nominate race, found along the Himalayas, has little to no black on the crown and hence, is very similar to the females. In the northern plains of India, breeding males of *A. t. humei* have a black cap and olive on the mantle. In southwestern India and Sri Lanka, breeding males of *A. t. multicolor* have a jet-black crown and mantle. The other

forms seen are intermediate between *A. t. multicolor* and *A. t. humei*, with more grey-green on the rump.

**The Common Iora** moults twice a year, and the transition plumage can make it difficult to tell the races apart based on plumage.

**Behaviour:** It is usually seen singly or in pairs, and sometimes in small groups, foraging in trees for insects. It may also be seen as part of mixed feeding flocks. Its habitat is scrub and forest. During the breeding season, the male performs an elaborate courtship display, puffing up all his feathers (especially those on the rump), darting up into the air and spiraling down to the original perch, and looking almost like a yellow, green, black and white ball; he will then spread his tail and drooping his wings.

The call of the Common Iora is a mixture of muted *churrs*, sharp chattering and melodious whistling, and the song is a trilled *whee-tee*. They have also been known to imitate the calls of drongos. Two calls can be heard here. 

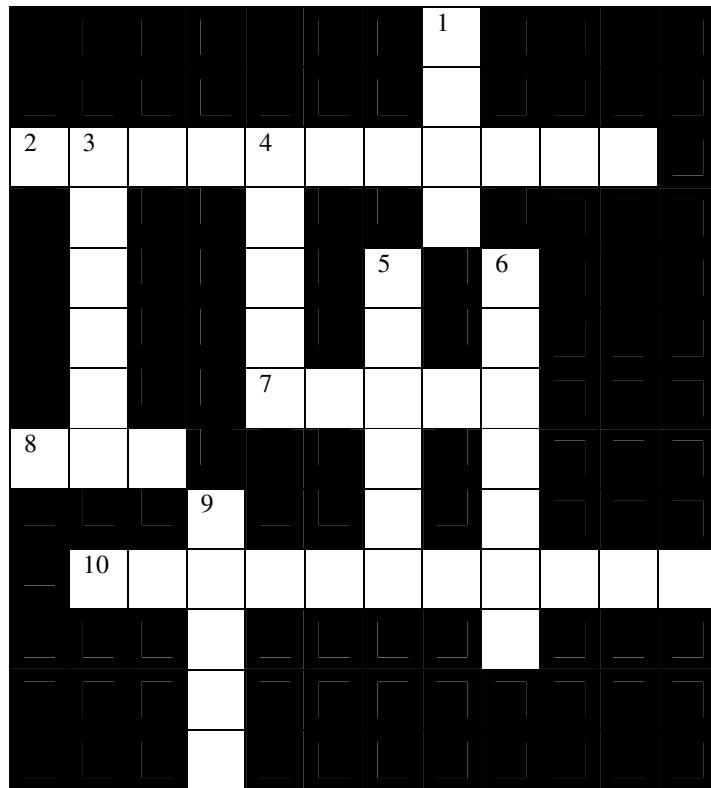
**Nesting:** The Common Iora breeds between May and September, with some local variations. Its nest is small and cup-shaped, made out of grass and cobwebs, and placed in the fork of a tree. The clutch consists of 2-4 greenish-white eggs. Incubation duties are performed by both parents, and eggs hatch in around 14 days. Nest predators include lizards, snakes, and birds like the Coucal and the Crow. Nests may also be brood-parasitized by the Banded Bay Cuckoo.

**Local name:** It is known as '*shaubeegi*' in Hindi, '*patsu-jitta*' in Telugu and '*sinna mambala-kuruvi*' in Tamil.

## **BIRDING CROSSWORD #8**

Umesh Mani

The answers to the clues given below are bird names or other birding-related terms. Let's see how many you can find!  
(*Solutions in next month's Pitta*)



### **ACROSS**

2 - This bird likes old laws? O wow! (9)  
7 - This bird needs a good rinse (5)  
8 - A layer partly of rich enamel (3)  
10 - Move stealthily on the tree, but with hesitation (11)

### **DOWN**

1 - They fly in slow motion (4)  
3 - At the beginning of October, the French in Rio get this golden bird (6)  
4 - A USSR bird (5)  
5 - This bird is not a retard! (6)  
6 - A small animal doctor (7)  
9 - Sounds like it will pull your leg? (5)

Solutions to Crossword #7 (Pitta, July 2012)

**ACROSS:** 3 – DOWITCHER, 6 – LOON, 7 – FANTAIL, 9 – GRANDALA, 10 – HABITAT

**DOWN:** 1 – ROBIN, 2 - CRANE, 4 - CALL, 5 – PARROT, 7 – FINCH, 8 - BAZA

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**For Private Circulation Only**

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Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh  
New Series Volume 9 Number 8 August 2012 (Special Issue)

## ASSAM – AN AVIAN ARBOUR

### Special Report - BSAP Birding Camp at Assam, 11<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2011

With inputs from Surekha Aitabathula, Akshara, JVD Moorty, Shafaat Ulla



(Photo: Vikram P)

Our long cherished dream of a birding trip to the North-East region finally fructified, thanks to the suggestions given by our good friend Bikram Grewal, author and ornithologist of considerable repute. We were also helped by Manju Barua of Wild Grass Lodge in finalising our itinerary covering the major National Parks – Kaziranga, Nameri and Manas. Preparations for the trip started in right earnest and the response, as usual, was very encouraging. In fact, we had to restrict the number to 14.

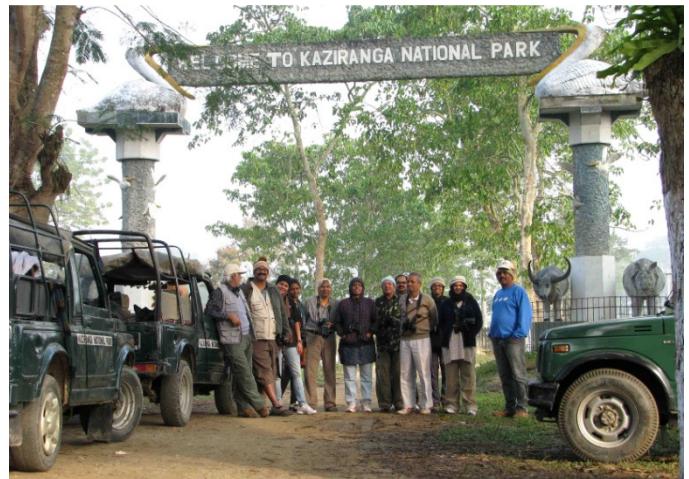
The date for departure was set for 11<sup>th</sup> December for those travelling by train (Moorty, Asif, Shafaat, Vikram, Ashok, Akshara, Krishna, Kalpana, Bhaskar and Chowdhry). Some, pressed for time, wanted to fly (Anjali, Promodh, Surekha and Gulshan) and started a day later and promised to meet the rest at Guwahati on 13<sup>th</sup> morning.

Though the train journey was rather monotonous (two days and two nights), time flew because of good company and good food - the chicken curry & rice highly recommended by Krishna. The flights were uneventful – however, Surekha had a huge scare as the connecting flight from Kolkata to Guwahati was cancelled, though eventually restored.

The train reached Guwahati bang on time at 6:30AM. Two vehicles, a Tata Winger and a Tata Sumo, were waiting for us, courtesy Manju Barua. We promptly loaded up and without wasting any time started for Kaziranga, a five-hour drive. En route, hunger pangs made us stop for breakfast at a small but decent place and we all did justice to the *puri* and *chhole*.

We reached Kaziranga by around noon. Our rooms at Wild Grass Lodge were ready. After having deposited our luggage in our rooms, it was unanimously decided to head straight to the park without wasting any time. We were provided three open-top Maruti jeeps with very competent guides.

Kaziranga was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1985. Sprawled across 430 sq. kms, bordering the south bank of Brahmaputra River, it is situated in Golghat and Nagaon districts of Central Assam. It consists mostly of grasslands – very tall elephant grass and water bodies which is interspersed with trees like *Albizia procera*, *Dillenia indica*, *Bombax ceiba*, *Viscofea japonica*, to name a few. It is divided into three sectors, each with a separate entry point. We covered the Central sector on the first day and the Western and Eastern sectors the next day.



(Photo: Asif Husain)



**Wild Buffalo** (Photo: Vikram P)

Wildlife could be viewed from close quarters as they are accustomed to vehicles. We saw the Great One-horned Indian Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*), Wild Buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis*), Sambar (*Cervus unicolor*), Hog Deer (*Axis porcinus*), Indian Wild Boar (*Sus scrofa*) and Indian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*).



**One-horned Rhinoceros** (Photo: Vikram P)



**Indian Elephant with calf** (Photo: Vikram P)

While a family of Indian Otters (*Lutra lutra*) were keeping us entertained, our attention was drawn to a rare acrobatic display high in the sky – a Pallas's Fish Eagle (*Anthracoceros albirostris*) trying to snatch fish from an Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*). It was fascinating to watch the amazing flying skills of both the birds. The aerial drama went on for about ten minutes and, finally, the rightful owner, the Osprey, won the contest and went off to have a quiet meal.



**Red Junglefowl**  
(Photo: JVD Moorty)

**Pallas's Fish Eagle (L) and Osprey (R)** (Photos: Vikram P)

Among some of the birds that we spotted were – the Greater Racket-tailed Drongo (*Dicrurus paradiseus*), Great Hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*), Red Junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*), Oriental Pied Hornbill (*Anthracoceros albirostris*), Northern Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*), Grey-headed Fish Eagle (*Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus*), Lesser Adjutant (*Leptoptilos javanicus*), Woolly-necked Stork (*Ciconia episcopus*), Black-necked Stork (*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*), Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*), Bar-headed Goose (*Anser indicus*), Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) and many other ducks and waders which were difficult to identify as they were too far away and we did not have a spotting scope.



**Black-necked Stork** (Photo: Vikram P)



**Great Hornbill**  
(Photo: Vikram P)



**Lesser Adjutant** (Photo: Vikram P)



**Northern Lapwing** (Photo: Vikram P)



**Bar-headed Goose** (Photo: Vikram P)



**Woolly-necked Stork**  
(Photo: Vikram P)

To say that Wild Grass Lodge was stately and classy would be a gross understatement. The building had an unmistakable old world charm and was surrounded by beautiful gardens and dense vegetation, including huge trees with high canopies like the *Anthocephalus cadamba*, *Alstonia scholaris*, *Lagerstromia flos-reginae*, *Dalbergia sisoo*, etc. The campus itself provided for good birding and we enjoyed observing the Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher (*Culicicapa ceylonensis*), Daurian Redstart (*Phoenicurus erythrogaster*), Red-throated Flycatcher (*Ficedula parva*), Chestnut-tailed Starling (*Sturnus malabaricus*), White-rumped Shama (*Copsychus malabaricus*) and not to forget the Pied Falconet (*Microhierax melanoleucus*), the most beautiful bird of prey, about the size of a bulbul. The total bird count so far was a healthy 149!



**Mallard** (Photo: Asif Husain)



**Pied Falconet**  
(Photo: Asif Husain)



(Photo: Vikram P)

After having been thoroughly spoilt by the sumptuous food and warm hospitality at Wild Grass Lodge, we started for Tezpur by late afternoon of 15<sup>th</sup>. After a three hour journey and after crossing the mighty Brahmaputra River we reached Tezpur by night fall – that is 5:00PM. Being winter, it gets dark very early! We stayed at Prashanti Lodge of Assam Tourism. Dinner was ordered at the lodge and while it was being prepared, the ladies went to the market, escorted by Vikram, and brought a lot of eatables for our lunch the next day at Nameri N.P. We all retired for the day, after a good and wholesome vegetarian dinner. Total bird count - 50!

Next day, the 16<sup>th</sup>, we were up and about by 6AM. To our dismay, we found that the whole place was enveloped in thick fog with visibility down to a few meters. We started nevertheless, driving very slowly, and headed for Nameri, about 35km away and an hour's drive under normal visibility. We, however, reached the place by about 9:00AM because of fog, bad roads and the usual pit-stop for breakfast. The fog thankfully had cleared by this time.

Nameri is a picturesque National Park spread over an area of 200 sq kms. It straddles the eastern Himalayan foothills of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh along the banks of the Jia Bhoroli River in Sonitpur district. Though declared a Reserve Forest in 1978, it was only in 1985 that it was declared a Wildlife Sanctuary, and a National Park in 1998. Nameri's tropical enclaves comprise semi-evergreen, moist deciduous forests interspersed with cane and bamboo and narrow stretches of savannah lining the riversides. The few trees that we saw were *Dillenia indica*, *Viscofea japonica*, *Terminalia bialata*, *Gmelina arborea*, etc.



(Photo: Vikram P)



**Red-breasted Parakeet** (Photo: Asif Husain)

car – noise pollution. Anjali, clearly agitated, went upto the driver and gave a mouthful upon which the music volume was promptly lowered. Brave girl indeed!

A forest department boat rowed us across the river in two batches. There is a forest post and nobody is allowed to stay in the forest overnight. With our guide in the lead and the guard at the rear, we entered the forest through a walking path. We were rewarded with many sightings like the Spangled Drongo (*Dicrurus hottentottus*), Abbott's Babbler (*Malacocincla abbotti*), Blue-bearded Bee-eater (*Nyctyornis athertoni*), Striped Tit Babbler (*Macronous gularis*), Black-crested Bulbul (*Pycnonotus melanicterus*) and the Scarlet Minivet (*Pericrocotus flammeus*).

An interesting sighting was that of the Malayan Giant Squirrel (*Ratufa bicolour*), a very large and handsome creature indeed. It is deep brown or blackish in colour with the body measuring 15 inches and a thick fluffy tail measuring 2 feet! The underparts are creamy buff. As we were all admiring the squirrel, the guard suddenly silenced us and loaded his 8 mm rifle. The guide informed us in hushed tones that there was a herd of elephants close by. We could, indeed, hear their footsteps and the breaking of twigs and branches. They seemed to be coming our way and nobody wanted to mess with them. We, therefore, marched out quietly from the forest and came back to the river bank. We came back to the Eco-Camp by 3:00PM and did justice to the bread/butter/jam that we were carrying and returned to Tezpur by late evening.



**Black-crested Bulbul** (Photo: Asif Husain)

There is the Posali Eco-Camp at the entrance of the park where one can stay. The campus and the surroundings are full of greenery and huge trees. We paid the entrance fees and took along a guard who was to be our escort throughout. From the entry to the river is only 1km and everyone decided to walk after obtaining permission from our rather reluctant guard, but not before seeing the Red-breasted Parakeet (*Psittacula alexandri*), the Hill Myna (*Gracula religiosa*) and the Blue-throated Barbet (*Megalaima asiatica*). As soon as we started walking, a Common Mongoose (*Herpestes edwardsi*) crossed our path; it was a good omen!

The Jia Bhoroli River is quite wide with clear blue waters and offered a fantastic view of the thick forest of Nameri NP, our destination for the day. There were a few picnickers by the river bank, with one of them playing very loud music from the



**Blue-bearded Bee-eater**  
(Photo: Asif Husain)

Kaziranga, Nameri and now a 7:00AM departure from Tezpur involving a 6-hour drive to Manas, meant a breakfast halt en route. The densely forested Manas is located in the Eastern Himalayan foothills and owes its name to the Manas river, which, in turn, is named after the serpent goddess Manasa. This river is a major tributary of the Brahmaputra, which passes through the heart of the National Park. The river also acts an international border dividing India and Bhutan.



**Eurasian Tree Sparrow** (Photo: Vikram P)



(Photo provided by JVD Moorty)

time inside the forest at Mathanguri on the Manas River at the Bhutan border; and that is exactly where we headed to.



Chestnut-headed Bee-eater (L) and Chestnut-tailed Starling (R) (Photos: Vikram P)



mist. A Changeable Hawk Eagle (*Spizaetus cirrhatus*) had Asif scurrying to get a photograph, but that was enough to whet our avian interest for more. With about an hour and a half of daylight left – sunset was at 4:30PM – we decided to bird along the banks of one of the arms of the river and the narrow path that led into the jungle. A Common Hawk Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*) kept us busy and then it was the river with its pristine beauty. The far shores of Manas were also made up of Small Pratincoles (*Glareola lactea*) that blended into the stony background. The path into the forest was teeming with activity: Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters (*Merops leschenaulti*) mingled with Yellow-footed Green Pigeons (*Treron phoenicoptera*). Tree tops and bushes were dotted with Chestnut-tailed Starlings (*Sturnus malabaricus*). The ubiquitous Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) stalked through the grass. A Grey-backed Shrike (*Lanius tephronotus*) marked its presence amongst the shutterbugs. Not to be left behind, a Spangled Drongo (*Dicrurus hottentottus*) sallied past, noting the eager-eyed birders thirsting for more. And amidst this hubbub of activity, about 700 metres away, a male Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) began its seductive display watched by seemingly uninterested consorts, a performance briefly interrupted by the ponderous arrival of an Indian Elephant (*Elephas maximus indicus*) - this was the sign for us to walk back to the camp while there was still a vestige of daylight.

A brief background of the park to begin with: Manas National Park was declared a sanctuary on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1928 with an area of 360 km<sup>2</sup>. Manas Tiger Reserve was created in 1973. The total area of the park is 950 km<sup>2</sup> with altitudinal variations ranging from 61m to 110m above mean sea level. In 1992, UNESCO declared it as a World Heritage Site in Danger, due to heavy poaching and terrorist activities. On 25<sup>th</sup> February 2008 the area was increased to 950 km<sup>2</sup>. On 21<sup>st</sup> June 2011, it was removed from the List of World Heritage in Danger and was commended for its efforts in preservation.

The park area falls in five districts: Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, Udaguri, and Darrang and is divided into three ranges. The western range is based at Panbari, the central at Bansbari near Barpeta Road, and the eastern at Bhuiyapara near Pathsala. Most visitors come to Bansbari and then spend some

We arrived at our lodgings, aptly named Florican Cottage, located in the Bansbari Range at 1:30PM, and after divesting ourselves of the dust and our belongings in our cottages, we repaired to a tasty lunch gorging ourselves on the distant Himalayas veiled in a light



Indian Peafowl displaying (Photo: Asif Husain)

Dinner and an early night brought us to an early morning start that was exceedingly foggy with visibility down to a few metres; vehicles were boarded and off we went into the forest, fog and all. Our drive to the river bank site of Mathangudi was punctuated by frequent stops with sightings of the Great Barbet (*Megalaima virens*), Lineated Barbet (*Megalaima lineata*), the Blue-throated Barbet (*Megalaima asiatica*) and an Oriental Pied Hornbill (*Anthracoceros albirostris*) flapping its way over the tree tops. Mathanguri was alive with locals and their families who used the lovely wooded area as a picnic zone. A troop of Capped Langur (*Trachypithecus pileatus*) had us hoping for a sighting of the elusive and reclusive Golden Langur (*Trachypithecus geei*).



Lineated Barbet (Photo: Vikram P)



Capped Langur (Photo: Vikram P)

Our way up along a motorable dusty path with the river Manas on one side and woody Himalayan slopes on the other, kept us busy – both aurally as well as visually. A flock of Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*) was frolicking in the river, completely oblivious to the busy flitting of the White-capped Water Redstart (*Chaimarronis leucocephalus*) and, not too far away, the Plumbeous Water Redstart (*Rhyacornis fuliginosus*). A Little Pied Flycatcher (*Ficedula westermanni*) was shot by a lucky few camera toters.



White-capped (above) and Plumbeous Water Redstart  
(Photos: Asif Husain)



Great Tit (Photo: Vikram P)



**Streaked Spiderhunter** (Photo: Asif Husain)



**Blue Whistling Thrush** (Photo: Anjali Pande)



**Crimson Sunbird**  
(Photo: Asif Husain)



**Rufous Woodpecker**  
(Photo: JVD Moorty)



**Asian Barred Owl**  
(Photo: Asif Husain)



**Indian Roller** (Photo: Vikram P)

Working our way through the Common Mynas (*Acridotheres tristis*) and the Jungle Mynas (*Acridotheres fuscus*) and a vocal flock of Black-crested Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus melanicterus*), we walked past the border check-post after a non-verbal acquiescence by the Bhutanese border guard for Shafaat to come upon a Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) feasting upon a Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*), which, needless to add, was faithfully recorded for posterity by many. The sighting of the Great Hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*) winging its way over the tree tops on the far side of the river was rejuvenating to say the least, and we wanted more! And more it was in the form of ruby-red bejewelled Crimson Sunbirds (*Aethopyga siparaja*), Mrs Gould's Sunbirds (*Aethopyga gouldiae*), Green Imperial Pigeons (*Ducula aenea*) and Streaked Spiderhunters (*Arachnothera magna*). We also had a good look at a family of Bonnet Macaque (*Macaca radiata*) high up in trees. A Blue Whistling Thrush (*Myophonus caeruleus*) bid us goodbye as we walked back to the vehicles and lunch.

A not-so-slow lunch later we decided to explore the jungle around the car park and were soon privy to the pecking of the Greater Flameback (*Chrysocolaptes lucidus*), the Greater Yellownape (*Picus flavinucha*), the Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos macei*) and the Rufous Woodpecker (*Celes brachyurus*). All these interspersed with the Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo (*Dicrurus remifer*), the Ashy Drongo (*Dicrurus leucophaeus*) and the unblinking stare of the Asian Barred Owl (*Glaucidium cuculoides*).



**Bengal Florican** (Photo: Vikram P)

the city, bumper-to-bumper, car-by-car!

The third morning dawned bright, clear, sunny and cloudless contrary to the expectation of the pessimists, contrary to the forecast of your truly who knew these conditions very well; that notwithstanding there was a last minute two-jeep ride into the jungle which turned out to be the highlight of the trip: there are 14 species of the family *Eurylaimidae* in the world and of these India has two species, viz. the Collared or the Silver-breasted Broadbill (*Serilophus lunatus*) and the Long-tailed Broadbill (*Psarisomus dalhousiae*), both of which were seen very close to each other in the jungle! Topping this was the sighting of the Bengal Florican (*Houbaropsis bengalensis*), which Vikram managed to capture on camera! Our lodgings at the Florican Cottage proved to be an omen.

Post-lunch we drove back to Guwahati, but crossing the Brahmaputra proved to be more time-consuming than the long drive with all traffic of Assam appearing to head into



**Yellow-footed Green Pigeon** (Photo: JVD Moorty)



**Long-tailed Shrike (*L. s. tricolor*)**  
(Photo: Asif Husain)



**Greater Adjutant**  
(Photo: Asif Husain)

The last morning split us into two groups with one going to the local garbage dump to sight the Greater Adjutant (*Leptoptilos dubius*) and the White-vented Mynas (*Acridotheres cinereus*) while the other group paid obeisance at the famous Kamakhya temple.



**Small Niltava (Left), Jungle Myna (Centre) and Yellow-bellied Fantail (Right)** (Photos: JVD Moorty)

Our arrival at the Guwahati station brought us tidings of the train having a 12-hour delay for that day that had us scurrying to the airport to reach Kolkata so that we could complete the last leg of the journey to Hyderabad, but then that's another story!



**Golden-fronted Leafbird (L) and Streak-throated Woodpecker (R)** (Photos: Vikram P)



**Banded Bay Cuckoo** (Photo: JVD Moorty)



**Crested Serpent Eagle** (Photo: Asif Husain)



**Red-vented Bulbul (L) and Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush (R) (Photos: Vikram P)**



**Citrine Wagtail (L) and Blue Rock Thrush (R) (Photos: Asif Husain)**



**White Wagtail (L) and Ferruginous Pochard (R) (Photos: Asif Husain)**



**Grey-headed Lapwing (L) and Ruddy Shelduck (R) (Photos: Vikram P)**

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**For Private Circulation Only**

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**For information, write to:** Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** [http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap\\_online](http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online). **Website:** [www.bsap.in](http://www.bsap.in). **Society membership** (in Rs.): Admission: 100; Annual: 400 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh  
New Series Volume 9 Number 9 September 2012

### **FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2012, 6.00AM: Mahavir Harina Vanasthali National Park.**

Planned and started as a sanctuary for the endangered Black Buck, the park now houses considerable numbers of Cheetal. As for birding, there should be several small woodland birds, some ground birds like Partridges and Stone Curlew and, perhaps, even a Nightjar. Short-toed Snake Eagles have nested in this park earlier.

This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

### **INDOOR MEETING: VULTURES ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION?**

**Thursday, 6<sup>th</sup> September 2012, 6.00PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034.** (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443)

Vultures in the Indian subcontinent and South-East Asia have declined catastrophically during the last decade, and current populations are estimated to be less than 2 % of the original. The main reason for this decline appears to be the use of the veterinary drug, Diclofenac, which is used to treat cattle. Andhra Pradesh had six species of vultures but this number has reduced to a few species and a few individuals.

Dr. G. Umapathy, a senior scientist in the Laboratory for the Conservation of Endangered Species (LaCONES), Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad, will talk to us about the current status and distribution of vultures in Andhra Pradesh, *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation and management issues. He has more than 20 years experience in the field of wildlife research and conservation of endangered species. His research interests are conservation and management of small populations in fragmented landscape, conservation breeding using assisted reproductive techniques and wildlife endocrinology.

### **INDOOR MEETING: TALK ON BIO-DIVERSITY**

**Thursday, 20<sup>th</sup> September 2012, 6.00PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034.** (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443)

This talk by Mr. S. Ashok Kumar touches upon the broad contours of bio-diversity in our state and country; bio-resources; salient features of the Biological Diversity Act; Patent Laws; bio-piracy cases in India and other countries and success stories in benefit sharing.

Mr. Ashok Kumar is a life member of BSAP. An expert on butterflies as well, he is the Vice-President of the AP Butterfly Conservation Society. He is a member of the AP State Wildlife Advisory Board and a member of the Advisory Council of WWF – AP Chapter.

### **Trip Report – Ananthagiri Hills Reserve Forest – 16<sup>th</sup> August 2012**

Jayati Mitra

Ananthagiri Hills is not a new place for me as a birder. The very idea of revisiting this forest delighted me as I reminisced over the recent visit during spring. We started a little late and the weather was cloudy throughout the journey. For company I had Mr. Kevin who had become a

member more than twenty years back and was joining the BSAP field trip after a long gap. It was interesting to hear from him that Sanjeervaiah Park was a beautiful birding spot in those days when the present Necklace Road had not yet been constructed.

We spotted Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) in their breeding plumage on treetops on both sides of the road. The surrounding vegetation was lush green and the graceful Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) were running around. The sight of the once very common but now dwindling species, House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) generated some hope in us for their survival in the future.



**Coppersmith Barbet** (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

As we reached the venue all our birder friends welcomed us. We immediately sighted a Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*) on a tree near the car park. As we went down the slope, the music of chirping birds filled the air. Two Indian Grey Hornbills (*Ocyceros birostris*) flew across towards a banyan tree laden with ripe figs. I learnt an interesting fact that the female of this species moults in the nest while raising its chicks and the feathers grow again along with the growing chicks so that they can fly away together. The harsh call of the Rufous Treepies (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*) drew our attention and one was spotted with its long, black-tipped tail visible amidst the thick foliage.



**Indian Grey Hornbill** (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

As we moved along the bird songs grew louder and more melodious. A Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) was seen flying in the sky. The call of the Common Hawk Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*) became distinct as we walked towards it. The direction of the call, however, seemed to change every now and then till at last we gave up, disappointed.



**Rose-ringed Parakeet** (Photo: Vijay Menon)

A group of Rose-ringed Parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*) with bright red beaks were flying from tree to tree. By now we were deep in the forest where a group of Jungle Babblers (*Turdoides striatus*) with grey-brown plumage greeted us. They were hopping and foraging on the ground. As we looked up we spotted a bird which was unmistakably a White-bellied Drongo (*Dicrurus caerulescens*). It had white under parts and a grayish-black back, with a slightly forked tail.



**White-bellied Drongo**  
(Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

The forest was dense with good undergrowth. We noticed some photographers hiding behind bushes with infinite patience. The reason for their patient vigilance was soon obvious. Far beyond the trees, a nest of the Oriental White-eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*), made out of dry brown leaves, was visible near the ground and everyone was waiting eagerly to catch a glimpse of the bird feeding its chicks. We, at last, saw the bird and identified it by the white ring surrounding its eye, the blackish bill and olive green body stooping forward in a typical manner. Plum-headed Parakeets (*Psittacula cyanocephala*) were seen flying and they perched on top of a tree, chattering. Their rosy heads with a yellow beak, contrasting against the green plumage was a lovely sight.

As we stood there quietly for some time I could hear a whistling tune. It sounded like a flute being played and in no time we saw the Oriental Magpie Robin (*Copsychus saularis*) sitting on a bare branch. It sang for quite some time oblivious of our presence. A flock of Scaly-breasted Munias (*Lonchura punctulata*) were flying low as we spotted the brown body and black-and-white spotted breast. As we scanned the trees a bright yellow colour attracted my attention. I glimpsed the black-crowned body, striped with black and yellow - the Common Iora (*Aegithina tiphia*) - hidden among the leaves. After a while we slowly moved along, the music still lingering in my mind.



**Black-rumped Flameback**  
(Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

We then reached a place surrounded by tall teak trees. As we scanned the foliage, we saw White-browed Fantails (*Rhipidura aureola*) flying from one tree to another, opening and shutting their tails rhythmically. A Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*) was digging a hole in an old, bare twig by moving its head in circles while rubbing its beak continuously into the hole to increase its size. Its dedication and patience really inspired me. Suddenly a golden back and crimson head

came into our view. We moved forward following the Black-rumped Flameback (*Dinopium benghalense*) climbing swiftly up and down the trunk, often disappearing out of our sight and again reappearing. I could not help admiring the special features of a woodpecker. Out of the four toes Nature has given them, two toes point forward and the other two backwards, to enable them to grip, a trait similar to that of the barbets. It was consistently drumming on the bark, probably looking for a mate or for food. It is also known to have a very long sticky tongue to enable it to trap insects hidden deep inside the tree trunk.



**Red-vented Bulbul** (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

After a while we decided to return. Some other birds we saw were the Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*), Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*), Large-billed Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*), Asian Paradise-flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*), Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*), Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*), Purple Sunbird (*Nectarinia asiatica*), Purple-rumped Sunbird (*Nectarinia zeylonica*), White-browed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*) and Spotted Dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*).



**Common Myna** (Photo: Vijay Menon)

On our way back we took the road towards Sadashivpet by mistake and came across a water body very close to it. The dull weather had not permitted spotting of raptors, but now we were in luck! We saw a Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*) as it flew down and rested on an overhead wire. A Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*) was resting on the island while the Little Grebes (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) dived in and out of the water. Quite a few Common Coots (*Fulica atra*) were swimming, their white bills showing up in contrast with the black plumage. The Purple Swamphens (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) were also present.



Red-rumped Swallow (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

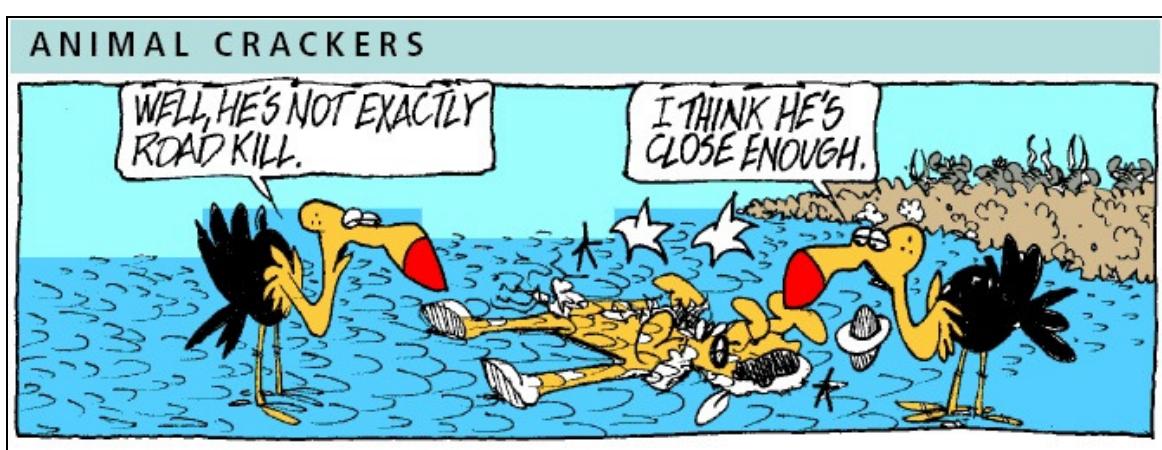
At this point I could not help comparing this trip with the previous one. The cloudy weather made sightings more difficult and as a result our total bird count was really less. I really missed the acrobatics of the Paradise-flycatcher and the colourful bee-eaters but the atmosphere was vibrating with bird songs. I was also told that earlier, nightjars could be seen during daytime also but now it was difficult to spot them even at night! Are they disappearing from this forest? I reached home hoping to be back again and see something different and more exciting next time.



Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar

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### Bird Humour



(From Times of India, 20-06-2012)

## **Bird of the Month**

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

### **Brown Fish Owl (*Bubo zeylonensis*)**



**Brown Fish Owl** (Ananthagiri, 06-06-2009)

Order: Strigiformes

Family: Strigidae

Genus: *Bubo*

Species: *B. zeylonensis*

Size: 55 cm

**Description:** The Brown Fish Owl is part of the family known as 'typical owls', Strigidae. Most living owls today belong to this family. There are four sub-species of fish owls: the Sri Lankan Brown Fish Owl *B. z. zeylonensis*, found in Sri Lanka; the Common Brown Fish Owl *B. z. leschenaulti*, found in the Indian sub-continent and across to Myanmar and Thailand; the Western Brown Fish Owl *B. z. semenowi*, found from Western Asia / the Middle East to Pakistan; and the Eastern Brown Fish Owl *B. z. orientalis*, found in north-eastern Myanmar, Vietnam and south-eastern China (though the latter's distinction from *B. z. leschenaulti* is debated). These four fish owls were previously separated into the genus *Ketupa*, but nowadays are often lumped with the horned and eagle-owls for convenience.

The Brown Fish Owl is distributed across the warm, humid tropical and sub-tropical parts of continental Asia, as well as some offshore islands. It is a large owl with prominent 'ear' tufts. A full-grown bird will reach around 55 cm, and weigh 2.0-2.5kg. There may be some differences between sub-species, and the males are smaller than the females. Smaller birds can weigh as little as 1.1kg – in other words, there can be considerable difference in size and weight. The Brown Fish Owl has reddish upperparts, heavily streaked with black or dark brown. The underparts are buff-to-white, and have dark

streaks and fine brown barring. The white throat is often noticeably puffed out, and the facial disk is indistinct. The Brown Fish Owl has yellow irises, dark bill and dull yellow feet. The sexes are similar, except for size.

**Behaviour:** Resident through the year in most parts of its range, the Brown Fish Owl mostly inhabits well-wooded lowlands, including open woodland, dense forest and plantations, though in the Himalayan foothills it can range upwards to around 1500m above sea level. It usually remains fairly close to larger water bodies like rivers or lakes. It is a nocturnal bird, but can be seen during the day when it is roosting; this may, at times, be aided by observing the mobbing behaviour of small birds. Being a large predatory bird, more than 1-2 individuals are rarely seen together. While listed as 'Least Concern' by the IUCN, it does face the threat of habitat destruction. Its diet consists mainly of frogs, fishes and aquatic crustaceans; when hungry, it may also eat carrion. The calls of the Brown Fish Owl include a loud *hu-hu-hu-hu*, a soft *hup-hup-hup-hup*, and a deep *tu-hoo-hoo*. One call can be heard here. [\[audio\]](#)

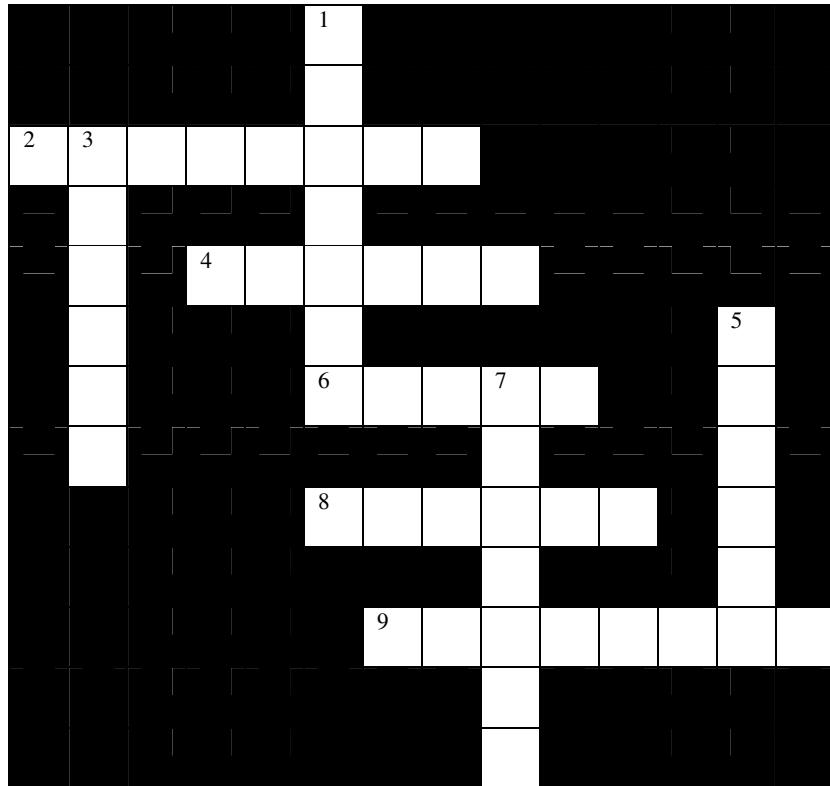
**Nesting:** The Brown Fish Owl breeds between November and March, laying a clutch of 1-2 eggs. For the nest, it may use rock crevices and other such niches, or, quite often, old stick nests of other birds. The incubation period is around 38 days, and the young would normally fledge in around 7 weeks.

**Local name:** It is known as 'macchera ullu' in Hindi and Punjabi, 'chepala gudla guba' in Telugu, 'machhimaar ghuvad' in Gujarati and 'matsyoluk' in Sanskrit.

## **BIRDING CROSSWORD #9**

Umesh Mani

The answers to the clues given below are bird names or other birding-related terms. Let's see how many you can find!  
(*Solutions in next month's Pitta*)



### **ACROSS**

2 - No pirate will have this bird! (8)  
4 - This bird comes across as rakish (6)  
6 - Beer the German head gave (5)  
8 - Mental exercise on the back! (6)  
9 - Hot-headed peasant stays on the ground? (8)

### **DOWN**

1 - Festive decoration or streamer (7)  
3 - Feels bad being topless! (6)  
5 - Airborne carrier (6)  
7 - This bird will bite NTR! (7)

Solutions to Crossword #8 (Pitta, August 2012)

**ACROSS:** 2 – WOODSWALLOW, 7 – SERIN, 8 – HEN, 10 – TREECREEPER

**DOWN:** 1 – OWLS, 3 - ORIOLE, 4 - SARUS, 5 – DARTER, 6 – MINIVET, 9 - TESIA

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**For Private Circulation Only**

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**For information, write to:** Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** [http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap\\_online](http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online). **Website:** [www.bsap.in](http://www.bsap.in). **Society membership** (in Rs.): Admission: 100; Annual: 400 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh  
New Series Volume 9 Number 10 October 2012

### **FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 21<sup>st</sup> October 2012, 6.00AM: Narsapur Reserve Forest, Medak Dt.**

Spanning an area of over 40 km<sup>2</sup>, the Narsapur Forest is well known for its bird life. The forest is rich in small woodland birds, woodpeckers and flycatchers. A Pitta was also sighted recently in the same forest. The lake and its environs promise interesting sightings. This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

### **INDOOR MEETING: EARTHFLIGHT**

**Thursday, 11<sup>th</sup> October 2012, 6.00PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034.** (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443)

A British nature documentary, Earthflight is a six-part voyage of discovery, spanning six continents and covering some of the world's greatest natural spectacles from a 'bird's-eye view'. Narrated by actor David Tennant, it captures some of the world's most extraordinary natural wonders through the eyes of birds. It is, to put it simply, breathtaking.

From 9,000 metres above the ground, viewers are given a new perspective of the continents through the latest tricks of cinematography. 'Spy-cams' expose the personal habits of wildlife, while slow-motion filming techniques reveal every millimeter of detail about birds, both in-flight and during their interaction with other creatures. The opening episode focuses on North America and is a lesson in intelligence, brotherhood and survival.

### **Trip Report – Mahavir Harina Vanasthali National Park – 23<sup>rd</sup> Sept. 2012**

KR Gurukumar



Photo courtesy: G Siva Saradhi

Hello friends and readers of Pitta. Let me introduce myself first. I am Gurukumar, a scientist by profession. Bird watching is a new hobby for me and, trust me, I am enjoying it more than I thought I would. I had joined BSAP a week before this trip. Though I am from Hyderabad, I was not aware that there was such a huge National Park in the city. The deer park is a 3600-acre

space of lush green protected forest. 300 acres is open to public but the remaining is out of bounds. Thanks to the permission from the Forest Department we were able to access the reserve area. We were a mixed group of about nine people from different backgrounds but united in our common interest - birds.



Asian Koel (Photo: KR Gurukumar)

We assembled at the park at about 6.30AM and were soon escorted inside. We first spotted House Crows (*Corvus splendens*), which were everywhere. We carried on and spotted Black Buck and Spotted Deer grazing and a mongoose, as well. We saw a Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) and then a couple of Red-vented Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*). We heard peafowl calling but they remained elusive throughout the trip. Then we spotted a male Asian Koel (*Eudynamys scolopaceus*). Being surrounded by experienced birdwatchers made a difference - they helped me identify the birds and shared tips on how to differentiate between similar ones.



Ashy Prinia (Photo: KR Gurukumar)



Asian Brown Flycatcher (Photo: Humayun Taher)

We spotted the Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*) and then the Asian Brown Flycatcher (*Muscicapa dauurica*). I was

amazed at Mr Humayun's ability to identify birds through their calls. He explained that he had been birding since childhood and was introduced into this hobby by his father. He showed me how birding can be such an involving experience using both eyes and ears for identifying them.

Soon after, the birds seemed to become elusive and we did not see any for a long time. After scanning the skies in vain, everyone's attention was drawn to the beautiful and colourful butterflies that flitted around us. Mr. Shafaat was extremely interested in butterflies. For me each of them was a beautiful piece of nature's creation that is hard to find in the crowded city life. That was not all. Mr. Chowdhary showed us some red-coloured seeds with a black spot. They were used to measure gold in the bygone ages. These seeds do not absorb moisture and hence they weigh the same always. The seeds are extremely poisonous though.

After a long walk we saw a few more birds like the Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*), Shikra (*Accipiter badius*), Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*), and some swallows and egrets.

We had breakfast at the watch tower. Sharing food builds a strong bond of friendship and I very much hope that during my membership with this group I will make some good friends. The view from this vantage point was beautiful. Kudos to the Forest Department for keeping such a green reserve amid the concrete jungle we call a city. Everyone was a little tired by then. Suddenly there was a lot of excitement and everyone was looking at the skies. Mr. Humayun identified the bird as an Oriental Honey-buzzard (*Pernis ptilorhyncus*).

The feast had to end as, they say, all good things have to end. But on a positive note - we saw and heard about thirty species of birds including some babblers, Green Bee-eaters (*Merops orientalis*) and Black Kites (*Milvus migrans*). As it is said every ending is a new beginning, I eagerly await a new trip to a new destination.



Green Bee-eater (Photo: KR Gurukumar)

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**Report - Indoor Meeting – 6<sup>th</sup> September 2012**  
**OH VANISHING VULTURE!**  
Surekha Aitabathula

Sad news for nature lovers. The vulture population in India declined in excess of 97 per cent over a period of twelve years. Could we have stemmed the decline if we had woken up to the threat in the first year itself? Well, that is anybody's guess. Dr. Umapathy, Senior Scientist at the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, delineated the importance, reasons for decline, current status and future action plan for the vanishing vultures in an informative lecture presented at the German Centre last month.

This amazing and ugly scavenger bird has been the primary remover of carcasses and, hence, its decline brings changes in the equilibrium between natural scavengers and other animals (stray dogs); increased risk of rabies and livestock-borne diseases like anthrax. It is considered an ecological barometer that helps us in understanding the health of an ecosystem. The vulture does its bit in supporting the traditional custom of the Parsi community who place their dead in the 'Tower of Silence'.

According to the current IUCN Red List category, the White-rumped Vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*), the Slender-billed Vulture (*Gyps tenuirostris*) and the Indian Long-billed Vulture (*Gyps indicus*) are critically endangered. Conversely, the Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) and the Himalayan Vulture (*Gyps himalayensis*), with 'increasing' and 'stable' population trends respectively, are happily perched on the Least Concern Category of the same Red List.

We gleaned from Dr. Umapathy that the decline of vultures was first recorded in Keoladeo Ghana National Park and the reasons for decline were loss of habitat, non-availability of carcass/food, infectious diseases, pesticides and poisoning. Other reasons after post mortem and lab analysis included Visceral Gout. An accumulation of uric acid within tissues and on the surface of internal organs was observed in 85 per cent of the dead vultures. Virus isolation, Molecular Biology, Electron Microscopy, Bacteriology and Transmissibility, all gave negative results on lab analysis. Toxicology studies did not indicate either heavy metal poisoning or toxic residues of organophosphates or organo chlorines. Neither was any conclusive evidence of epidemic disease found.

In the past, Andhra Pradesh boasted of six species of vultures - the White-backed, the Long-billed, the Egyptian, the Griffon the King and the Cinereous. Between 1990 and 1995, around 8000 vultures were seen in the state. Compared to the current dismal figures, it seems the decline has been steadily disastrous.

To bring back the guardian of a clean environment, the methods suggested were restoration of food availability and habitat, artificial feeding centres (vulture restaurants), tall trees, conservation breeding - semen collection and storage, etc. All these measures, in effect, should be a part of the future action plan to save the vulture from extinction.

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**Sight record of the Heuglin's Gull (*Larus heuglini*) at Osman Sagar, Hyderabad**  
Humayun Taher, Anand Kalinadhabhatla, Sathya S

In the early morning of 7<sup>th</sup> October 2012, three of us were birding around the dam wall of Gandipet Lake (+17° 22' 24.73", +78° 19' 7.71"), Hyderabad. On this trip, we observed, flying over the water, a single large Gull which, from photographs taken at the time and references to the field guides we were carrying, was identified as a 1<sup>st</sup> year juvenile of the Heuglin's Gull (*Larus heuglini*).

The Heuglin's Gull is predominantly a coastal species and has so far not been recorded inland from this part of the country. The bird is primarily a Central Asian coastal species, migrating from the tundra regions (where it breeds), down to South-west, South and East Asia and East Africa. Small numbers are seen in South-east Asia; a

few scattered records also exist for South Africa, besides some vagrant records for Western Europe.

It is not in the scope of this note to discuss the extant inland records and sightings of this species. This will form the subject matter of a more exhaustive note later on. This short note is merely to inform the BSAP members of the presence of interesting migrating birds in the skies around Hyderabad. Now that the winter migration is gathering momentum, it behooves us all to keep an eye open for interesting sightings. Going by records over the past couple of years, it begins to appear that the Hyderabad plateau may be a more important migration path than has been previously suspected.

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**Report - Indoor Meeting – 20<sup>th</sup> September 2012**  
**BIO-RESOURCE, BIO-DIVERSITY AND BIO-PIRACY: ON THE EDGE OF LIFE**  
Urmimala Chatterjee

Mr S Ashok Kumar gave a well informed and a comprehensive talk on the meaning and implications of bio-piracy in a world diminished of bio-resource and bio-diversity.

Mr Ashok Kumar is an acknowledged authority, being a member of the State Wildlife Advisory Board and an Advisory Council member to the World Wildlife Fund, Andhra Pradesh chapter. His talk was one of erudition and reflection upon the practice of bio-piracy and of the consequent preservation in an economic order driven by conquest, greed and domination.

#### **Man cannot recreate a forest**

The key point of the talk could be aptly summed in a single line: "Man cannot recreate a forest." When a tree or a plant disappears or dies out, it takes with it 10-30 dependent species such as insects, higher mammals and other plants. A microcosm is devastated – lost forever. Communities that live close to the natural world disappear as well or become depleted in their lives.

Of primary concern has been the patenting of the bio-resources of the naturally rich, lush tropical countries or, in other words, the countries always labeled as the Third World. As Mr Ashok Kumar stated repeatedly throughout - "they steal from us and they bleed us", referring to the practices of the civilized first world.

#### **What is bio-resource?**

Bio-resources are resources of nature in that they are genetic resources, organism populations and other biotic components of the ecosystems - in other words, the lush, wild world around us and everything in it and on it.

#### **What is bio-diversity?**

Bio-diversity is a component of bio-resource. It is the sum total of flora and fauna, of mammals, domesticated animals, birds, reptiles, profusion of wild and cultivated plants, sheer varieties (species diversity) and variables (genetic diversity) – germ plasm that Nature has in her kitty.

In India, there are 12 mega bio-diversity centres with 22 hotspots. Andhra Pradesh is fourth in terms of bio-diversity – having 81 mammal and 452 bird species. There is one tiger reserve in the state, five national parks, and 26 wildlife sanctuaries which are host to a number of rare and disappearing species of birds and animals. Among them are the Indian Gaur, Indian gazelle, sloth bear, wild dog, painted stork, the Great Indian Bustard. The smooth coated otter is found in Kolleru.

Following the Rio convention, India was the second country after Brazil to enact the Biological Diversity Act

The Great Indian Bustard is a rare bird – their numbers add up to only 120 in Sri Lankamalleshwaram, Reddipally in Kadapa district. The Slender Loris is found in Sri Venkateswara while elephants that roam there cross over from Tamil Nadu.

The Kolleru lake is a sanctuary and a stopover for migratory birds whose number diminish with every passing year. It is also a threatened sanctuary. The Pulicat Lake, which is the largest lagoon in South Asia, is in the same state.

#### **What is traditional knowledge?**

Traditional Knowledge is born of the earth in observation and practice of the natural world. Traditional Knowledge is about agricultural and medicinal practices passed on by word of mouth. They constitute stories, songs, folklore, proverbs, cultural beliefs, rituals, community laws, ancient scriptures and what have you!

In traditional knowledge, there is need to codify and document to protect the traditional knowledge of indigenous communities and help them have access to equitable benefit sharing.

#### **What is bio-piracy?**

Bio-piracy is the appropriation of bio-resources and bio-diversity without prior intimation and informed consent. Patent is the process of establishing rights upon usage of the name and constituents of the material patented; a process often misused for the appropriation of the bio-resource and traditional knowledge systems of the countries of the South and using it and trading on it with another name, another package and amassing profits by selling it to those countries from where the knowledge actually originated.

An area of 2,00,000 hectares of rain forest in South America was destroyed to meet Germany's timber demand. In another part of the world, in India, Goa was stripped of iron ore to feed Japan's steel mills.

#### **Global Policy Initiatives**

Against such a way of life in a world ruled by greed, initiation towards action and justice is masked in opportunistic and ulterior motives. Nonetheless, in The UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 there was clamour for protecting bio-resources by the affected countries. A total of 123 countries including India signed the CBD but, it must be mentioned, not the USA.

2002. In India, the Act has 12 chapters and 65 sections. The Act has formulated a three-tier system of functioning.

The law enforcement bodies are the National Bio-diversity Authority, the State Bio-diversity Management Committee and a Local *Panchayat*.

An indispensable part of this mode of functioning has been the chronicling of traditional knowledge relating to the bio-diversity of the area.

#### **Patent Laws: Plethora of Misuse**

Patent laws are meant to protect the integrity of the knowledge source and resource base but in practice something else happens. Essentially, what patent laws do is to take a resource and patent it elsewhere.

Bt cotton was patented by Monsanto and sold to 60 companies across the world. They were then sold at high rates to farmers in countries like India. Subsequently, soils were leached of nutrients, farmers driven to debt and suicide because the inputs were pitilessly high and, in comparison, the returns were terribly inadequate - besides, of course, making the land useless for years to come.

In India, every plant, root, fibre and flower is known for use in wellness, illness, on ceremony and occasion. The values and virtues of herbs and plants of *pudina*, *kalamegha*, turmeric, *ashwagandha*, ginger, *zeera*, onion have been extolled in the ancient Sanskrit texts of *Astanga Samagraha*, *Yoga Ratnakara* and *Tarangini* of

the fifth century. China's attempt to patent *pudina* and *kalamegha* were foiled by India. There have been 32 patents for turmeric. In another case, patents for all the systems of medicine - of Ayurveda and Unani have been revoked.

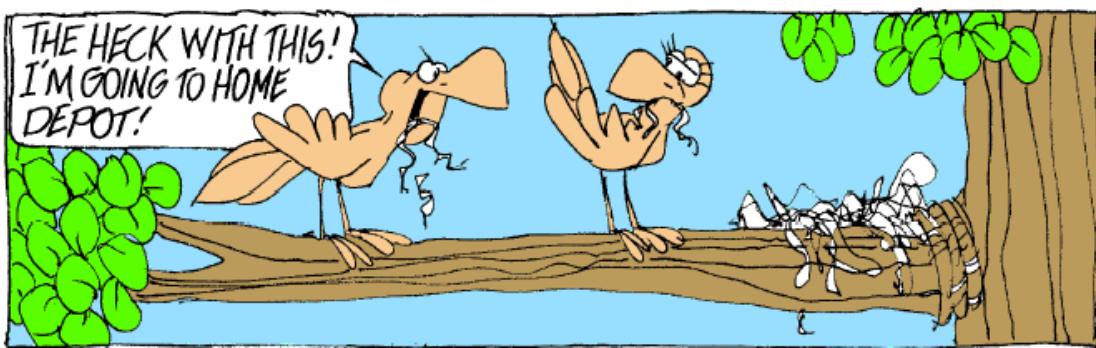
Patents for *jamun*, bitter gourd, *gur*, egg plant, *basmati*, *methi*, *kala jeera* - have all been contested by India. There have been battles for patents on 200 medicinal plants that are India's by right. Their knowledge, their use and their natural area of growth DO NOT belong elsewhere. There are thefts happening all the time - by companies and by individuals who creep into the country to destroy by stealth and cunning. A Swiss MNC's ploy to patent cows' milk from India was foiled in 2011. Yoga, which is the physical and spiritual practice of India, has 168 patents in the selling of yoga devices, mattresses and socks. The USA is selling yoga accessories.

#### **Where does the future lie?**

Given the current trends and the avarice how can we transform the present world order? How do we preserve our rich, natural legacy? How do we preserve our age-old wisdom and try and create newer wisdoms? Where is the way out? How can we live without our natural world? Yes, there are other movements at work, other currents of thought that run counter to what is happening all around. So, is there a way out or is there not?

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#### **Bird Humour**



(From Times of India, 02-08-2012)

## **Bird of the Month**

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

### **Green Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*)**



**Green Bee-eater** (Kanchanbagh, Hyderabad, 30-09-2009)

Order: Coraciiformes

Family: Meropidae

Genus: *Merops*

Species: *M. orientalis*

Size: 16-18 cm

**Description:** The Green Bee-eater, like all bee-eaters, is a richly-coloured, slender bird. Almost two-thirds of its total length is made up of the elongated central tail feathers. The bird has a bright green plumage overall, with the throat and chin being tinged with blue. The bill is black, crown and upper back are golden-rufous, and flight feathers are black-tipped rufous with a green wash. The iris is crimson, and the eyes have a narrow black stripe in front of and behind them. Legs are dark grey, and the feet are weak, with the three toes being joined at the base. The elongated tail feathers are absent in juveniles, and the sexes are alike. Leucistic individuals have been known to occur.

Besides five other sub-species ranging west from Iran to northern Africa, the following sub-species are described in Asia: *M. beludschicus*, having paler colours and a pale throat, seen from Iran to Pakistan; *M. orientalis*, with rufous-tinged head and neck, seen in India and Sri Lanka; *M. ferrugineiceps*, with rufous crown and mantle, seen in north-eastern India, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam; *M. ceylonicus*, having nape and hind-neck with the more-pronounced golden brown sheen, seen in Sri Lanka and often included with the nominate race.

The Green Bee-eater is seen abundantly across most parts of its range. In Africa and Arabia, it is generally seen in arid areas, but in the eastern parts of its range, it is more diverse in its habitats. It is seen mostly in the plains, but can sometimes be found as high as 5000-6000 feet up in the Himalayas. Generally resident in the lowlands, some populations do migrate locally, moving to drier regions during the rainy season, and to warmer areas in winter. In some parts of Pakistan, they are summer visitors.

**Behaviour:** A fairly tame bird, the Green Bee-eater often allows fairly close approaches. Somewhat sluggish in the mornings, the birds are found huddled next to each other in small groups, often with their beaks tucked into their backs until well after sunrise. Usually seen singly or in small groups, the Green Bee-eater hunts from low perches, sometimes just a meter high, and readily uses man-made perches like fences, electric wires and television antennae. Unlike other bee-eaters, they are often found away from water, and are becoming more common in urban / suburban neighbourhoods. Their diet consists mainly of insects like wasps, bees and ants, which they catch by launching into brief, zigzag flights from open perches, returning to the same perch to consume it. Before swallowing the insect, the bee-eater removes stings and breaks the exoskeleton by repeatedly thrashing it on the perch on which the bee-eater is sitting. It is also known to occasionally take crabs. The Green Bee-eater sand-bathes more often than other bee-eaters, and may also bathe in water by dipping into it while in flight.

These birds roost in large groups of 200-300, moving around excitedly and calling loudly, and frequently disperse explosively before settling back at the same roost site. The call of the Green Bee-eater is a nasal trill *tree-tree-tree*, usually given in flight; the call can be heard here. 

One study<sup>[1]</sup> has suggested that Green Bee-eaters may be able to interpret the behaviour of human observers. The birds showed an apparent ability to predict whether a human at a particular location would be able to spot a nest entrance, and then behaved in such a manner as to avoid giving away the location of the entrance to the observer. Only primates were previously believed to possess this ability to look at a situation from the point of view of another being.

**Nesting:** The breeding season lasts from March to June. Unlike other bee-eaters, the Green Bee-eater is a solitary nester, making tunnels or using hollows in vertical sandy

banks; during this process, the breeding pair is often joined by helpers. The nest tunnel can run as much as 5 feet in, and the eggs are laid on bare ground at the end of the tunnel. The eggs are spherical and glossy white, and the typical clutch is 3-5, varying with rainfall and insect food density. The incubation period is around 14 days, and the young would normally fledge in 3-4 weeks, sometimes showing a reduction in body weight at this stage.

**Local name:** It is known as '*patringa*' or '*harial*' in Hindi, '*chinna passeriki*' in Telugu, and '*kattalan kuruvu*' or '*panchankam*' in Tamil.

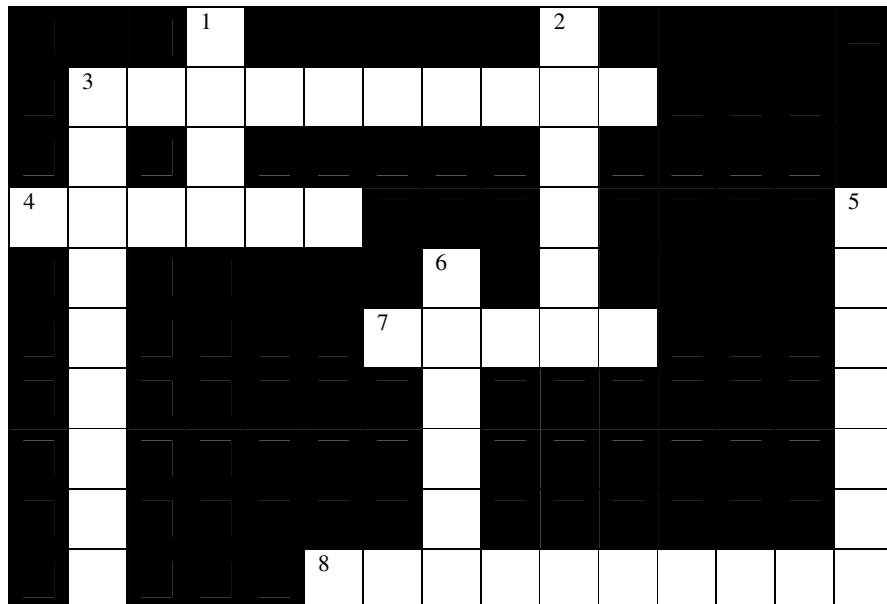
**References:**

1. Watve Milind, Thakar J, Kale A, Pitambekar S., Shaikh I, Vaze K, Jog M., Paranjape S. (2002). "Bee-eaters (*Merops orientalis*) respond to what a predator can see". *Animal Cognition* [5 \(4\): 253–9](#).

## **BIRDING CROSSWORD #10**

Umesh Mani

The answers to the clues given below are bird names or other birding-related terms. Let's see how many you can find!  
(*Solutions in next month's Pitta*)



### **ACROSS**

3 - Fly along with Cancer and Capricorn? (10)  
4 - Come to an arrangement for kissin' this bird! (6)  
7 - Think about the chicks (5)  
8 - Gin takes the tram-car up the cliffs (4, 6)

### **DOWN**

1 - Member of the Crow family has a chess piece (4)  
2 - Gordon's black bird (6)  
3 - This bird is arthritic! (5-4)  
5 - Fish-eater digesting a pencil? (7)  
6 - 'airpin bend! (6)

Solutions to Crossword #9 (Pitta, September 2012)

**ACROSS:** 2 – PETRONIA, 4 – SHIKRA, 6 – GREBE, 8 – MANTLE, 9 – PHEASANT  
**DOWN:** 1 – BUNTING, 3 - EGRETS, 5 - PIGEON, 7 – BITTERN

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**For Private Circulation Only**

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**FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 18<sup>th</sup> November 2012: Ananthagiri Hills Reserve Forest. Meeting Point: Punjagutta Cross-roads, 6.00AM**

Spanning an area of over 40 km<sup>2</sup>, the Narsapur Forest is well known for its bird life. The forest is rich in small woodland birds, woodpeckers and flycatchers. A Pitta was also sighted recently in the same forest. The lake and its environs promise interesting sightings. This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

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**Trip Report – Narsapur Reserve Forest – 21<sup>st</sup> Oct. 2012**

Text: Gulshan; Photos: Asif Husain



Brahminy Starling

We were supposed to start by 6.00AM from Punjagutta, but started half an hour late. The winter had set in and there was a nip in the air. We started in a convoy of six cars and a bike and met with a fairly thick fog en route. Thankfully the fog cleared by the time we arrived at the forest. While this was my first BSAP outing, we were joined by a fairly large number of first-timers.

We started birding in earnest, under the guidance of the veterans. A *Spathodia* tree was in full bloom and had attracted lot of common birds like Sunbirds, Mynas and Parakeets and some others, including the Oriental White-Eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*). Just then someone pointed out the difficult-to-see Golden-fronted Leafbird (*Chloropsis aurifrons*). We all had a good look before it flew to another tree where we were rewarded with the sight of a Verditer Flycatcher (*Eumyias thalassina*).

After having a long look at these birds, we headed further into the interior and were lucky to spot a Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*), which was identified by Asif. We continued further till we came to a large bare tree and were delighted to see a Blue-Faced Malkoha (*Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*), sitting serenely, followed by a Common Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*) sitting on another branch. As if this was not enough, a flock of noisy Plum-headed Parakeets (*Psittacula cyanocephala*) also landed on the tree! Just then a lone Pied Crested Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*) flew past. This was the most satisfying half hour that we spent at this spot. Some of our friends had gone further into the jungle and they reported seeing Red Avadavat (*Amandava amandava*), Yellow-eyed Babbler (*Chrysomma sinense*) and many more.



Yellow-eyed Babbler

We now decided to head back and as we turned there was some commotion. Lawrence heard some grunting and suddenly an Indian Wild Boar (*Sus scrofa*) dashed out real fast, giving us a fleeting glance. We reached our cars and all of us took out our packets of breakfast, with a large variety on offer. While we were doing justice to the breakfast, Shafaat uncle was busy selling BSAP T-shirts and caps and enrolling new members. Rasheed and Nitin helped him with handing over the merchandise and keeping track of the money.



Common Iora

After satiating our hunger pangs, we proceeded to the jungle on the other side of the road. The first thing we noticed here were huge spider webs, almost a meter across with beautifully coloured spiders resting expectantly in the center. This is a wonderful place with huge trees and a small stream flowing underneath. The bird life here was not as plentiful but still we managed to see Common Iora (*Aegithina tiphia*), Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*), Long-tailed Shrike (*Lanius schach*), and some other common ones.



Purple Sunbird Male in eclipse plumage

We now decided to head for the Narsapur Tank. It had a very high water level because of which there was hardly any bird life, except for a pair of River Terns (*Sterna aurantia*). We all then decided to head for the bund to have good look at the old trees. Here we saw a pair of Great Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) circling overhead. Another interesting sight was of a huge bunch of Indian Flying Foxes (*Pteropus giganteus*) hanging upside down, creating quite a racket. We then headed back to our cars for the return journey.

Before I end, let me say that it was a wonderful outing and thoroughly enjoyable. Since it was cloudy, the birding was cool and comfortable. On the whole we saw nearly fifty different species of birds, and most of them, for us newcomers, were lifers. We were totally 27 persons, of which more than half were new. If my memory serves me right, Jeetender, Iqbal, S.N. Rao, Hemant, Venkat and Nitin Sanker became members, with a promise to attend all our future outings. Here's to lots of good birding ahead.

**Report - Indoor Meeting – 11<sup>th</sup> October 2012**  
**EARTHFLIGHT – STORIES OF JOURNEYS & MEETINGS**  
Urmimala Chatterjee

### **Background**

BBC's EarthFlight is a film of six parts that nurtures the stories of bird migrations across continents. A groundbreaking avian documentary, the stories have been told from a bird's eye view – literally. Cutting edge new filming techniques have been used to show the world like never before, in exquisite detail, but astride on the wings of a travelling bird, as they gaze, swoop, dive and rest on journeys that take them across valleys, rivers, oceans, deserts.

This extraordinary series has been commissioned by Jay Hunt, Controller BBC One, and Mark Bell, Commissioning Editor, Independents. To reinstate with a snatch of a quote from Bell: "... The very latest filming techniques take viewers right into the centre of the action as well as giving them a stunning bird's eye view of the world below." To do so, EarthFlight used a host of extraordinary filming techniques including filming "imprinted" flocks from microlites, wild flocks filmed from model gliders and silent drones, full-sized helicopter with stabilised mounts and cameras on the backs of trained birds.

And as the first episode was screened at the Goethe Zentrum on October 11, 2012, the arrayed visuals transitioned to capture stories of flight that has "given a whole new way of looking at the world."

The series took three and a half years to put together and has been made by John Downer Productions. John Downer Productions won numerous awards for their innovative approach to film-making. Recent, well-received series include 'TIGER – SPY IN THE JUNGLE' and 'SWARM – NATURE'S INCREDIBLE INVASIONS'.

### **Episode One: NORTH AMERICA – THE RITES OF SPRING**

This first of the series of EarthFlight was upon the circuits and patterns of migration in the continent of North America. The film begins to unspool the encounters and vicissitudes of migratory birds and their patterns of flights and meetings in a "snowstorm of snow geese" taking to the sky to outmanoeuvre the predatory tactics of America's national bird of cunning and guile – the bald eagle. The snow geese are on a journey of 5000 kilometres across – to their breeding grounds in the Arctic tundra. Theirs is part of a "spring migration that features other birds."

Elsewhere, brown pelicans travel north to fish. There are ways and secrets of the ocean that parents know and that which youngsters must learn. Humpbacked whales are the easiest to spot on the water. The breeding humpbacked males make a splash of froth and foam as they heave and

surge to reveal their five metre long fins and 25 tons of blubber. But, the dolphins are a different proposition as they swim on the edges of shoals of fish. The pelicans take their cue to dive from the dolphins and as they go into the waters, their pouches gape to scoop in "ten litres of water".



In Southern Texas, free tailed bats from Mexico have gathered to breed. It is the largest gathering of bats on the planet. Young preying hawks have to chase "the fastest and most agile bats in the world." The cycles of breeding and migration run concurrent to the other, with one animal's rite of passage at a junction point with that of another. The encounters create stories of survival, dependence and inter dependence.

Migratory birds like hawks and geese fly through well-travelled paths and routes known as "flyways". The Mississippi flyway is the most popular as the geese can stop anytime to rest or feed. But, all routes are not so easy. In the West, in the Grand Canyon, the bald eagle is exquisitely sensitive to the air currents – uplifts created by hills and cliffs. The stark gorges of the Grand Canyon were sculpted by the Colorado River 17 million years ago. It flows still and feeds the eagle as it flies across. Monument Valley towards the East offers no attractions for migratory birds. "Geese needing food or water have challenges to face". But, the sandstone buttresses deflect air upwards and the goose ride on the air to "join the other flocks flying upwards."

Routing across to the seashore on the West, the pelicans throng for a great feeding event. The pelican – whose "bill can hold more than his belly can" – gazes down below to a shoal of devil rays somersaulting at the rim of a shoal of fish. The cue is set for a "bizarre natural spectacle of North America". As the tide reaches its height and the sea gets noisy with surging water and foam, it splashes onshore weird grunion fish, spawning in an orgy. The beaks of the pelicans are too unwieldy to scoop up the fish spread thick the shoreline. But, as the tide turns and the fish retreat into the waters, the pelicans seize the chance to feed on what they can.

Yet, another strange fishing story unfolds in the marshlands of South Carolina where a pod of dolphins drive scooped fish up the mud banks. Watching egrets change position on the mud banks and pile up as fish upon fish flounder on the banks. This is the only place in the world where dolphins strand ashore to feed and they always use their ride side of the body. Young dolphins accompanying their parents learn the techniques of fishing as do young egrets from their parents. In fact, this one story of the egrets illustrates entirely “the extraordinary ability of birds to adapt to the opportunities on offer”.

The Californian gull who “lives by his wits” in the San Francisco Bay area heeds the “call of the wild” every spring and flies inwards, 65,000 in number to the desolate salty inland lake – the Mono lake – where the water is a “poisonous caustic chemical brew of alkaline salts.” Each morning, as the shorelines swarm with billions of breeding flies in a black haze, the gulls open their mouth and run to swallow in the flies. It is food for them as they gather to breed. It is food time for the snow geese as well as they fly down to rest upon a river basin, “waiting for the weather to change.” But, where geese gather, so do eagles. But, in life as in nature, there are stories that conceal and reveal in the twists and turns of event and incident. It is never an easy, straight route across the skies. As the geese check out of the sheltering, threatening river basin, the landscape transforms. The badlands of Dakota give way to natural grasslands – the prairies that are home to North America’s largest land animal – the bison. As the bison migrates in herds, so do the cowbirds that feed on the insects on their bodies. The birds are adroit in their understanding of bison behaviour and know when to take a chance and when to stay put, especially when male bison collude in a fight to win the female.

On the East, migrating snow geese, along with 250 migrating species travel across one of the greatest cities of the world – New York. Though another landscape

altogether, the tall buildings acts as buttresses – like the cliffs of Monument Valley – and lift up air in currents upon which the geese ride. Bald eagles travelling northwards stay close to water ways and gather at melt water streams and estuaries along with grizzly bears. It is a meeting point for another fishing story, of tussle, struggle, conflict and sport as the waters teem with salmon travelling upstream to breed. “As the rivers fill with salmon, the bears grow wild...and the cubs are caught between stuffing themselves and catching more.” The bald eagles with their trademark cunning seize chance and opportunity as they see it happen but the drama subsides as the bears withdraw and the eagles move on ahead to another place.



Meanwhile, the snow geese have arrived closer home. As they fly into the heart of the tundra, the geese “catch up with the retreating snow.” When they reach their home, the young birds leave their parents to breed. Baby geese nestle by their mothers who made the journey across to give them a life that they will soon know; of a survival of 5000 kilometres across the Earth. In the time between, the birds pause and play before another journey begins.

Sources: [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk) ; [www.dailymail.co.uk](http://www.dailymail.co.uk) ; [www.neogaf.com](http://www.neogaf.com)

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Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)



**Little Egret**  
(Cherlapally, Hyderabad, 13-06-2011)

Order: Ciconiiformes

Family: Ardeidae

Genus: *Egretta*

Species: *E. garzetta*

Size: 55-65 cm

**Description:** The Little Egret is a small white heron, with a wingspan between 88-106 cm, and weighing between 350-500 gm. It has all-white plumage. The adult bird has long black legs ending in yellow feet, and a slim black bill. The breeding season is marked by the appearance of two long plumes on the nape, along with gauzy plumes on the back and breast; the bare patch of skin between the eyes and the bill becomes red or blue. Juvenile birds are similar to non-breeding adults, but the legs are greenish-black, the feet a duller yellow, and the skin between the eyes and bill is grey-green.

Three sub-species are generally accepted: *Egretta garzetta garzetta* (seen in Europe, Africa and most parts of Asia, except the south-east), *E. g. nigripes* (seen in south-east Asia, from Indonesia south to New Guinea), and *E. g. immaculata* (seen in Australia and New Zealand). *E. g. nigripes* differs in that the patch of skin between the eyes and bill is yellow, and the feet are blackish.

Besides, three other egret taxa have been classified as sub-species in the past (though now regarded as separate species): the Western Reef Egret (or Western Reef Heron)

*Egretta gularis*, seen on the western coast of Africa (*Egretta gularis gularis*) and from the Red Sea to India (*Egretta gularis schistacea*), and the Dimorphic Egret (*Egretta dimorpha*) found in East Africa, Madagascar and nearby islands.

**Behaviour & distribution:** Like most other egrets, the Little Egret is quite skittish, and rarely allows close approaches. It is usually seen in small numbers, often in mixed groups with other egrets, Pond Herons, and other waders, and usually on the edges of, or fairly close to, a wide variety of small water-bodies like lakes, streams, rice-fields, flooded areas, mudflats, mangroves and the like. It roosts communally with other heron species in mangroves, reedbeds, or on dead branches over open water. Widely distributed, it breeds in wetlands in the warm temperate to tropical parts of Europe, Africa, Asia and Australia, after which populations may wander north in late summer. In warmer locations, permanent resident populations are also seen. Globally, therefore, it is not listed as a threatened species.

Once very common, its populations were decimated by over-hunting for food, and for the purpose of gathering its plumes, which were used in the decoration of hats – by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the numbers used for this purpose were reaching several millions in a single year. In fact, along with other factors, this is believed to have indirectly contributed to the establishment of Britain's Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) in 1889.

In the last 5-6 decades, with the enactment of various conservation laws, the populations have rebounded, and now, the species has also started colonizing new areas, being seen more frequently in the Caribbean islands, as well as Surinam and Brazil in South America, and north towards USA and Canada.

Their diet consists mainly of fish, insects, amphibians, crustaceans and reptiles. They hunt by stalking their prey, running with raised wings or shuffling their feet in low water, to disturb and grab small fish. They are also known, however, to stand still and wait to ambush their prey, especially near bottlenecks in small streams; at times, in drier areas they may also follow cattle. While feeding, birds may be at a fair distance from each other, and are known to defend their feeding areas strongly.

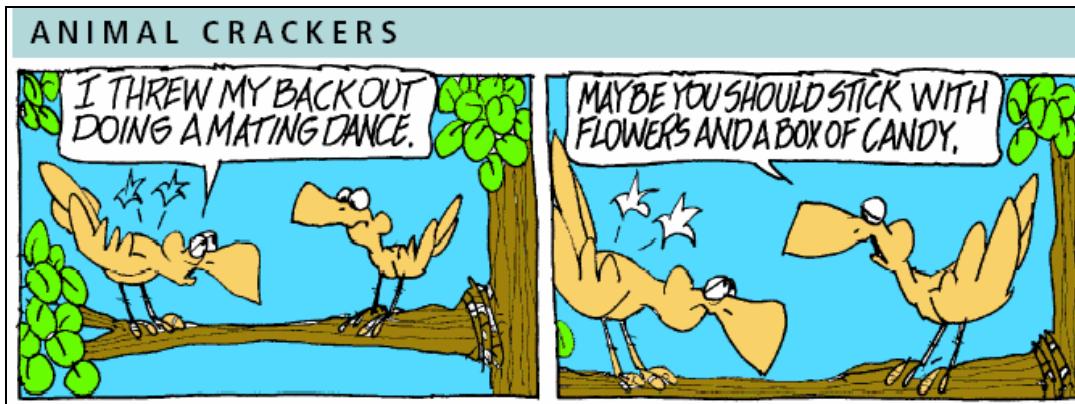
Little Egrets are mostly silent, but do produce various bubbling or croaking calls at the breeding colonies, and a harsh alarm call when startled. One such call can be heard here. 

Nesting: The breeding season lasts from March to June, though it may vary somewhat in different parts of its range. The Little Egret nests in colonies, often with other wading birds. The nests are built on platforms of sticks, located on trees, bushes, reed-beds or bamboo groves. In some locations like rocky islands, they have also been known to nest on cliffs. Nesting pairs may defend small breeding territories, extending up to 3-4 m from the nest. The eggs are oval and show a pale, non-glossy, blue-green colour. The typical clutch is 3-5 eggs, and the incubation duties are carried out by both parents. Young birds are covered in soft white down feathers, and are cared for by both parents.

Local name: It is known as '*kilchia bagla*' or '*karchia bagla*' in Hindi, '*chinna tella konga*' in Telugu, '*chinna vellai kokku*' in Tamil, and '*nano dhol bagalo*' in Gujarati.

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### Bird Humour

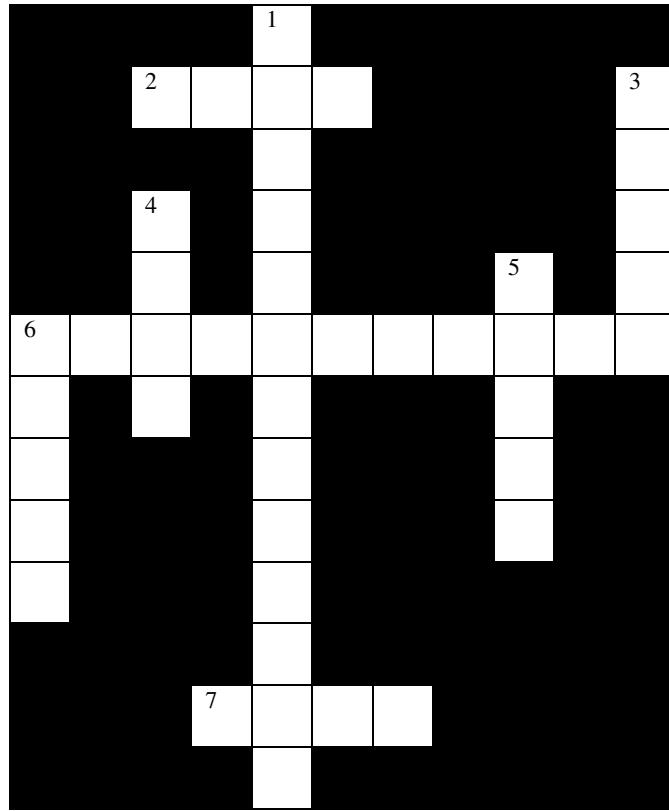


(From Times of India, 23-08-2012)

## **BIRDING CROSSWORD #11**

Umesh Mani

The answers to the clues given below are bird names or other birding-related terms. Let's see how many you can find!  
(*Solutions in next month's Pitta*)



### **ACROSS**

2 - Informal talk (4)  
6 - This bird uses a tin arm in the residence (5,6)  
7 - Bird from a Rio source (4)

### **DOWN**

1 - Messenger on the back of a bicycle (7,6)  
3 - Female bird? Or...maybe a male too (5)  
4 - This bird is mentioned in the music (4)  
5 - This bird is a supporter (5)  
6 - Birdwatchers use Eastern dish to stay under cover (5)

Solutions to Crossword #10 (Pitta, October 2012)

**ACROSS:** 3 – TROPICBIRD, 4 – SISKIN, 7 – BROOD, 8 – CRAG MARTIN

**DOWN:** 1 – ROOK, 2 - DRONGO, 3 – THICK-KNEE, 5 - PELICAN, 6 – PRINIA

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**For Private Circulation Only**

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**For information, write to:** Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** [http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap\\_online](http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online). **Website:** [www.bsap.in](http://www.bsap.in). **Society membership** (in Rs.): Admission: 100; Annual: 400 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh  
New Series Volume 9 Number 12 December 2012

## **FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 16<sup>th</sup> December 2012, 6.00AM: Manjira Barrage, Sangareddy, Medak District**

Made up of several small islands, the Manjira Bird Sanctuary spreads over 20 sq km and is nestled between the Manjira and Singur barrages. A number of migratory and resident birds nest and breed here. Painted Storks, Herons, Wigeons, Teals, Cormorants, Pochards, Black and White Ibises, etc can be found here. A few Mugger crocodiles too call this sanctuary home. It is located 60km from Hyderabad.

This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

### **BECKONING ANANTHAGIRI**

### **Trip Report – Ananthagiri Hills Reserve Forest – 18<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2012**

Text: Surekha Aitabathula; Photos: Umesh Mani (from archives)



**Orange-headed Thrush**

A field outing to Ananthagiri definitely draws a sizeable flock (or is it a parliament?) of birders always. I think no other birding spot in and around Hyderabad can emulate the lovely atmospheres of the Ananthagiri Forest. It is an inviting and embracing forest, complete with its very old and massive trees with their overarching canopies that hold out a promise of nature's winged wonders within

them. About thirty of us went down the broad steps that began at the threshold of the ancient Anantha Padmanabha Swamy temple and led us into the forest area. We were in eager anticipation to make the most of the first half of our Sunday. Let me vouch for all when I say that the forest did not disappoint us.



Indian Grey Hornbill

The opening gambit was the flight of several Indian Grey Hornbills (*Ocyceros birostris*) above our heads from left to right and then right to left. The hornbills are very distinct birds in flight as well as at rest. Another very happy find was the Yellow-footed Green Pigeon (*Treron phoenicoptera*)! This bird is a riot of olive yellow and pale greyish green colours with a beautiful mauve patch on the shoulder. It sat very high and camouflaged itself very well, making identification very difficult. However with much clamour amongst us for spotting and with incessant binocular staring, we successfully identified this fluffy, fat and beautiful pigeon as the Yellow-footed Green.



Yellow-footed Green Pigeon

I like the way the White-browed Fantail (*Rhipidura aureola*) always presents itself almost at the same spot on

each and every trip to Ananthagiri forest! He is the usual suspect it seems.



White-browed Fantail

The Orange-headed Thrush (*Zoothera citrina*) has a brilliant orange head and underparts with a blue grey mantle. This ground bird's foraging, daintily stepping around leaves and, sometimes, being seen with a leaf upon its head is simply a marvellous sight to behold. I guess bird watching began when someone first watched this kind of delightful bird behaviour.



White-bellied Drongo

We also got to see the White-naped Woodpecker (*Chrysocolaptes festivus*), White-bellied Drongo (*Dicrurus caerulescens*) and Great Tit (*Parus major*).

By now we were all pretty famished and attacked an expansively diverse breakfast menu. There were a whole lot of things to eat because almost everybody brought goodies. Even as we sat down to eat in a little clearing in the forest, we spotted a Large Cuckooshrike (*Coracina macei*).

After sumptuous breakfast and with lots of birding energy still left in us we all drove to Kotepally Water Reservoir. This reservoir fulfils the irrigation requirement of the agricultural fields around it. We walked and also drove along the bund abutting the reservoir. At almost the other end of the reservoir, we spotted around ten white birds that looked to me just like ten white birds! They were so far away that identification was extremely difficult. Serenely they moved on the surface of the water looking like a floating pure white sheet.



Green Bee-eater

We walked ahead on the bund, skirting the reservoir and came to stand at the edge of the water to watch a White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) and a couple of Green Bee-eaters (*Merops orientalis*). As we stood watching these common but nevertheless beautiful birds, a flock of Bar-headed Geese (*Anser indicus*) flew right above us. These were the self-same birds that had made identification impossible and flummoxed us earlier by being so far away. It was almost as if they were flying towards us to facilitate easy identification! On seeing them fly right overhead, all of us said loudly in unison, "Oh! They were Bar-headed Geese!" Such are some of the most thrilling moments of birding!

We also saw Gull-billed Terns (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) here. Kotepally Reservoir threw up three species of Ibis for our visual delight - Black Ibis (*Pseudibis papillosa*), Oriental White Ibis or Black-headed Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*) and Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*).



Black Ibis

The diagnostic features on the Black Ibis are the naked black head with a red patch on rear crown and nape, its stockiness, the reddish legs and a white shoulder patch. The Glossy Ibis has a finer bill, the adult breeding bird has narrow white surround to lores and the adult non-breeding bird has whitish streaks on head and neck.



Glossy Ibis

I have always perceived something mystical about the Ibis. The relative largeness of wing and stance; the sickle-shaped and finely down-curved bill, and its sheer presence that dwarfs any tree that it perches on, somehow make it a magical and mystical bird. To digress a little, I think it is no wonder that the African Sacred Ibis was venerated and worshipped by ancient Egyptians as a symbol of their God Thoth. Thoth is portrayed with the body of man and the head of an ibis. The Latin name of Black-headed Ibis is *Threskiornis melanocephalus* - Threskos means religious; ornis means bird; melas means black and kephalos means head. Interestingly, the African Sacred Ibis is also the icon of a Unit of the Israeli Special Forces. A symbol of their country's security forces - Nothing even remotely religious here! Such is the iconic image stature of the Ibis it seems!



**Black-headed Ibis**

My unbudging love for the raptors bore fruit on this day. We were driving back home from Kotepally when Shafaat Sir's keen bird sighting skills spotted a Crested Serpent Eagle (*Spilornis cheela*) for us! The raptor gave us a grandstand view, perhaps just six feet away! The hooded appearance at rest, with yellow cere and lores (which are the diagnostic features of this raptor) were distinctly visible sans binoculars! Lucky distance I thought. The CSE sat perfectly still on a very low branch of a not-so-big tree. Looking calm, fearless and royally indifferent to our presence.

A whole bunch of enthusiastic and fairly new comers like Ashwin, Sakina, Annapoorni (Anu), Bhujanga Rao (Bujji), Rakesh, Ishrat, Vikrant, Venkat, Urmimala, Siddharta and Siraj came to this trip. A cheerful Annapoorni climbed uphill just like Jack & Jill and came gingerly down the slope ably helped by chivalrous boys. Some men confined their chivalry to audio support as to how to come down the steep slope without slipping or falling! That was definitely a very funny moment!

Those of us who hopped into Ishrat's rugged and tough-looking Willyx open Jeep, wouldn't stop admiring this 1971 model that revved under Ishrat's expert driving. Venkat and Soni brought mouth-watering *chutney* and *idlis* which soon did the vanishing trick! Thanks to Soni who got up at 4.00AM to make *idlis* and, as a result, made us all the more ravenous than ever! It was interesting to note how people from diverse walks of life connect with nature and take to bird watching for relaxation. One wouldn't normally expect the owner of a foreign car dealership, a team lead in a pharmaceutical company, and a water waste treatment engineer to go birding, but Siraj, Vikrant and Ashwin respectively, chose to come to Ananthagiri and thoroughly enjoyed themselves! Another newbie Urmimala has not only taken to birding trips but has also begun to write for our house journal, the Pitta which, to me, is highly appreciable.

On the way back home, we stopped for late lunch at a roadside hotel that prominently advertised its speciality- Emu Biryani!!! No, we did not order Emu Biryani. We ate vegetarian *thalis* and drove home like a bunch of slightly tired but very happy and soul-satisfied birders.

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**Report - Indoor Meeting – 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2012**  
**EARTHFLIGHT Episode Two – AFRICA: HUNTERS OF SKY, WATER AND EARTH**  
Urmimala Chatterjee

EarthFlight Africa is filmed on changing, dramatic landscapes – one dissolving into the other and recreating another in a nurturing and sustenance of the intercourse of life, between sky, water and earth.

In Africa, the hunt is always on, the search and the tension is palpable in living bodies of birds and beasts. The big, wild, beautiful continent of Africa contains a drama and a story of life that is startling in its intrinsic nature. The patterns of flight and migration, across sky and land, in search of food and shelter is one of encounters, hazards and survival where things do not always work out to plan.

The story begins at the Southernmost tip of the continent that is splashed by a spread of ocean from the drop of Cape Mountain where cape gannets wing over the waters of the spreading, foaming, heaving Atlantic. Dolphins splash across the waters. Then, one of the gannets spots something in the waters. The gannet dives, a steep drop into the waters. It is a cue for others to follow. Into the deep blues, the birds break into a shoal of sardines.

But, there is always danger in the deep. As the gannets break into the shoal of sardines, hunters lurk in the waters – the white whales – but the gannets are safe for the day...

Into the mainland, a lone eagle soars across the sky, unmoving and still, her all-seeing eyes never missing the smallest detail...she looks to the earth for food...she looks at the other animals on earth. She follows the moving lions...and as she watches, her eyes intent, spread still across the sky... a shadow falls on the earth and a lioness turns upward to sky towards the silent eagle and watches back, intently.

From the vantage point in the sky, there are many secrets that the earth reveals...many voyages, gatherings and identities...it's a journey that continue

The eagle wings ahead – a lake emerges on the earth and a glistening diamond floats on top. What is it? The eagle moves down closer. The diamond reveals form and shape in a throng of lesser flamingoes migrating across the continent. They are the “most beautiful and graceful” birds in Africa but always vulnerable to attack. Often, they live in the most unsavoury places sifting through algae that give them the flamboyant colour. Always vulnerable, under watch and threat, the soaring fish eagle is their main enemy. They need a safe shelter on the waters – the lake will soon be empty. They will all be gone.

Back to the Southern tip of Africa, a bird very different from the cape gannet shares food and space with dangerous predators. Kelp gulls soar above Seal Island, home to over a thousand cape fur seals who have gathered to breed. Very suddenly, a sequence of actions that move as the undercurrents of the ocean is revealed dramatically in a surge of white whales rising from the waters tossing seals into their monstrous gaping jaws. The gulls are frantic and they eat whatever they can from the kill. The waters are splashed with blood.

In the mainland, a “very different wildlife spectacle” unfolds. In the dropping dusk, three million barn swallows are in flight. They are migrating back to their breeding grounds in Europe and they are made perfect for the long journey across the skies. Their “streamlined bodies,” “long pointed wings” and “forked tails” give sublime control and effortless manoeuvre as they drop down to drink without missing a beat. They are joined in the skies by white storks in a “race against time” to reach Europe. The storks glide, beat and flap wings – they travel when the sun shines. On a good day, a stork can journey up to 500 kms. They are awkward fliers and are vulnerable to water bodies on the earth below. Victoria Falls is a major landmark on their way where the Zambezi River plunges down into chasms below. It creates huge updrafts that are “perfect for soaring birds.” “It is a perfect place for a fish eagle to set up home...it is wet and wild but these are conditions that eagles relish.” The eagle patrols the one-and-a-half km canyon by the falling water; birds understand air currents in ways that are difficult to imagine. The entire landscape is a translucent crystal prism reflecting light and air.

Moving up North, the Rift Valley opens up to huge expanses of grasslands; vultures command the sky, soaring 11 km up into the air. The Serengeti plains contain the largest land migration in the world. On their way across the land, the wildebeest cross the torrential Mara river – “it is an accident waiting to happen.” As the wildebeest cross the dangerous waters, casualties are inevitable. The lurking crocodiles do not waste a chance as they kill in a rampage – it is carnage. As the wildebeest cross to the other side, they only have a narrow strip of earth to scramble up to as they are up against a formidable wall. It is a death trap – all it takes is one slip and the Mara is full of floating wildebeest. The Malibou storks gather to dismember the flesh.

In the sky, the flamingoes continue their quest for food. They are joined by flamingoes from East Africa. Just above the equator in Kenya is Lake Accuru where they stop to rest. But, the water quality is changing and scavengers have turned hunters. Hyenas charge and grab the slowest. The flamingoes struggle to take off and “it is not good to be at the back of a queue.” Lake Accuru has become a dangerous place with few attractions.

Up in the sky, the storks are flying but they are tired. They stop to rest in the bush; but “stopovers have their own hazards.” Hungry lions will hunt anything. But, “luckily for the storks, their sights are on bigger prey.”

The lions and the lionesses bring down a pair of wildebeest between them. And one eyeing vulture has landed and tiptoes sneakily from behind to snatch the catch from the lion. A straight fight will not work – she'll be dead in a moment. She must do it other ways. The vultures gather to watch and tease the lion to distraction. Eventually, in the hot sun, it becomes a war of attrition. The lion retreats. “The cunning plan has rubbed off...the vultures rush in where others fear to tread.”

High above, “the flamingoes are in their quest for the perfect lake.” Past the equator, in Central Kenya, they finally make it. In Lake Bogoria, flamingoes gather in their millions, the greatest concentration on Earth that happens once in every 20 years – “their bodies become a pink blanket on the shallows of the lake.” The water is brimming with all the algae they can eat – the lake lives up to the promise. “They have reached their Shangri La...but there's trouble in Paradise.” Baboons emerge out of the thickets on the banks and charge towards the beautiful birds on the lake and it's not just the baboons; fish eagles up in the sky always know what's happening. The baboons hunt in packs; they attack from all corners. The flamingoes have little chance, they fly up to the sky again. Among the baboons, pent up aggression causes fights to break out - exactly what the eagle was hoping for. “Although a hunter, she's never too proud to scavenge...she sends them packing but many more are waiting in the wings.” But, the plucky eagle holds out. At the end, it's a numbers game with the vultures.

As an interlude, the vicious, persistent attacks on the lovely flamingoes are a reflection to the brutalities that the beautiful and the gracious suffer in their struggle of life. Anything or anybody of beauty or of unique qualities is always under attack and always diminished and lost - either in life or in death.

Across the land, the migrating wildebeest stop by the Grumeti River – a favourite drinking spot but one of the most dangerous in the world. As they dip down, there is a massive heave and emerging crocodiles demonstrate their “lethal skills.” By the end of the killing spree, the crocodiles subside and vultures gather. The vulture’s life is a never ending search for food.

In one of the hot springs in a corner of Lake Bogoria, the flamingoes have finally found peace but they must be on guard; the fish eagle is still hungry, she is on the hunt and

“she can’t afford to fail this time.” She eventually lands a catch – “success at last.” And as ever, the Malibou stork never misses a thing.

The flamingoes gather in a celebration of life – they may miss one of their numbers but it’s a small price to pay. With two million together in peak form, they gather in a synchronized dance with each other where they mirror each other’s movements and form lifelong relationships. Their dance is one of the most beautiful in the bird world.

Swallows have flown 5000 kilometres. They cross the Sahara while the storks go by the life giving waters of the Nile. The common cranes too have joined the migration. They are headed out of Africa and they cross the Mediterranean. On the journey, things do not always go to plan but spring is waiting for them in Europe. There is a life ahead to be fulfilled.

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### Bird Humour



(From Times of India, 05-10-2012)

**Bird of the Month**  
Text and photos: Umesh Mani

**White-browed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*)**



**White-browed Bulbul**  
(Srisailam, March 2011)

Order: Passeriformes  
Family: Pycnonotidae  
Genus: *Pycnonotus*  
Species: *P. luteolus*  
Size: 20 cm

**Description:** The White-browed Bulbul is a member of the bulbul family of passernines. A resident breeder in peninsular India and Sri Lanka, the White-browed Bulbul largely olive-green upperparts and whitish underparts. It has a prominent white supercilium, a white crescent under the eye, and dark eye- and moustachial stripes. It has a yellow vent, and there is also some yellow on the chin and moustache, though the throat is white. It may also show 3-4 filoplumes on the nape. The sexes are alike.

Besides the nominate race, another sub-species *P. l. insulae* (seen in Sri Lanka) is recognized. This sub-species is somewhat darker, and has shorter wings.

**Behaviour & distribution:** The White-browed Bulbul is usually seen singly or in pairs. It is usually detected by a burst of spluttering, warbling song, consisting of a series

of up-and-down musical notes. It may often be seen on exposed perches but, being very shy, tends to dive into nearby shrubbery as soon as it senses any human presence, thus making it difficult to see from up close. It is endemic to southern India (with a northern boundary of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and western West Bengal) and Sri Lanka, and is not uncommon, but is more often heard than seen. Its typical habitat is dry, open scrub country, though it may also be seen in gardens and woodlands with dense shrubbery. Even while foraging for its diet of fruit, nectar and insects, it tends to remain inside the bushes.

**Nesting:** The White-browed Bulbul breeds between February and September, and may even breed twice a year, with peaks happening in February and September. In some areas, it avoids breeding in the dry period from May to July. The nest is a loose cup of twigs, cobwebs and hair, usually placed low and on the outer periphery of a thick bush. The typical clutch is 2 eggs.

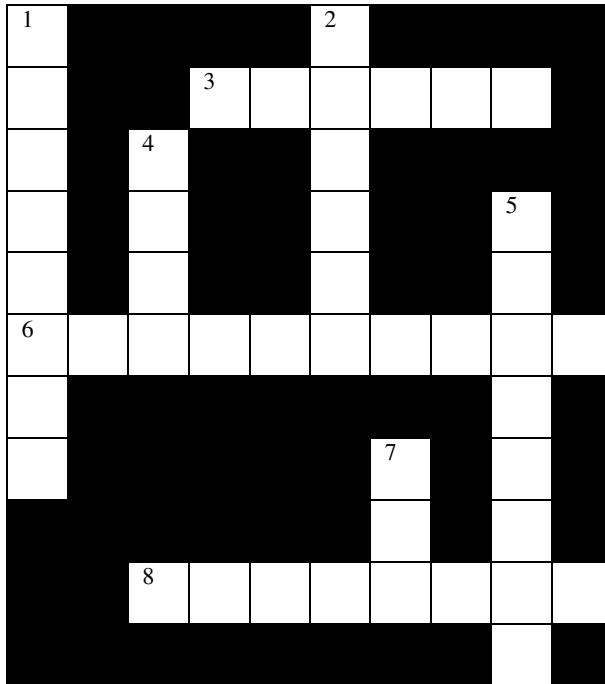
**Local name:** It is known as 'poda pigli' in Telugu, 'manjat kondai kuruvி' in Tamil, and 'shwetnen bulbul' or 'safed-nena bulbul' in Gujarati.

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## **BIRDING CROSSWORD #12**

Umesh Mani

The answers to the clues given below are bird names or other birding-related terms. Let's see how many you can find!  
(*Solutions in next month's Pitta*)



### **ACROSS**

3 - Love the PR this bird makes (6)  
6 - Made famous by Tchaikovsky (10)  
8 - Hating Junior will bring back this bird? (8)

### **DOWN**

1 - Atropine cures this bird (8)  
2 - O Coach! Show me the flier! (6)  
4 - Nautical unit of speed (4)  
5 - Songbird has an ear for this grain (8)  
7 - Can it fly backwards too? (3)

[Solutions to Crossword #11 \(Pitta, November 2012\)](#)

**ACROSS:** 2 – CHAT, 6 – HOUSE MARTIN, 7 – IORA

**DOWN:** 1 – CARRIER PIGEON, 3 - HERON, 4 – EMUS, 5 - STILT, 6 – HIDES

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**For Private Circulation Only**

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